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TALES OF THE GLADIATORS

Blood, gore and heroism in the arenas of Rome



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CROMWELL

FROM HERO TO ZERO

Why Henry VIII
turned against his
right-hand man

Chris Packham and
Peter Frankopan on
the long battle to save
the natural world

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Lord Lucan?**

The crime mystery that
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“It must be one of the most precipitous downfalls in English history. In April 1540 **Thomas Cromwell** seemed to be at the pinnacle of his career – adding a new noble title to his already burgeoning power base. But just three months later he found himself on the scaffold at Tower Hill, preparing to be executed for treason. What had gone wrong for **Henry VIII**’s right-hand man? In our cover feature this month, Cromwell’s biographer Diarmaid MacCulloch offers his answer to this Tudor conundrum. You’ll find that on page 32, and it should be a helpful primer for the **BBC drama *Wolf Hall***, which is set to return to our screens later this month.

Also arriving on our screens in the next few weeks is the sequel to Ridley Scott’s *Gladiator*, surely one of the most iconic of all historical blockbusters. If you’d like to know how closely the fiction cleaves to reality, then Guy de la Bédoyère is on hand this month to reveal the real adventures of Rome’s warrior entertainers. Turn to page 24 for some of the most dramatic tales from the Roman arenas.

A dramatic tale from more recent times is the 1974 **disappearance of Lord Lucan**, following the brutal murder of his family’s nanny, Sandra Rivett. It is one of the enduring mysteries of the 20th century, but the incident also shines a light on Britain in the 1970s, highlighting class tensions at a time of economic uncertainty.

Fifty years on, Laura Thompson surveys the aftermath of this shocking crime, on page 56.

I hope you enjoy the issue.

Rob Attar

Editor



THREE THINGS I’VE LEARNED THIS MONTH

1. Meeting of minds

It’s always intriguing to read about great figures from history meeting each other, and in our article on John Milton, I discovered that he encountered the astronomer Galileo during his travels in Italy (page 44).

2. Historical coffee habit

I’ve been a keen cappuccino drinker for many years, so I was fascinated to read in *Q&A* that its name relates to the brown colour of Capuchin friars’ habits (page 53).

3. Early readers

As I found out from Ruth Goodman’s piece on the Victorians, literacy in Britain made great strides during the 19th century. By 1860, she records that 70 per cent of boys and 60 per cent of girls could read and write when they entered the workplace (page 38).



THIS ISSUE’S CONTRIBUTORS



Hetta Howes

“Life was certainly more challenging for medieval women, but there were still female trailblazers who managed to have a huge impact on the world around them.”

Hetta celebrates the lives of four pioneering medieval women on page 63



Chris Packham

“When resources have been limited, that’s what’s encouraged humanity to adapt. But the enormous growth that’s taken place even since the 1980s is staggering, and terrifying. And that degree of growth is clearly unsustainable.”

Chris considers how the past can help us confront today’s environmental challenges on page 11



Annie Gray

“The media loves to lament the death of the high street, but a longer view shows the very concept has always been reactive and continually changing with the communities who interact with it.”

Annie charts the evolution of Britain’s high streets on page 70



Islam Issa

“I sometimes wonder why I’ve spent years reading and contemplating Milton. Perhaps it’s that his life and writing present such an eclectic mix of idealism and cynicism, of hope and despair – of what it means to be human.”

Islam explores the extraordinary life of the iconic poet and polemicist on page 41

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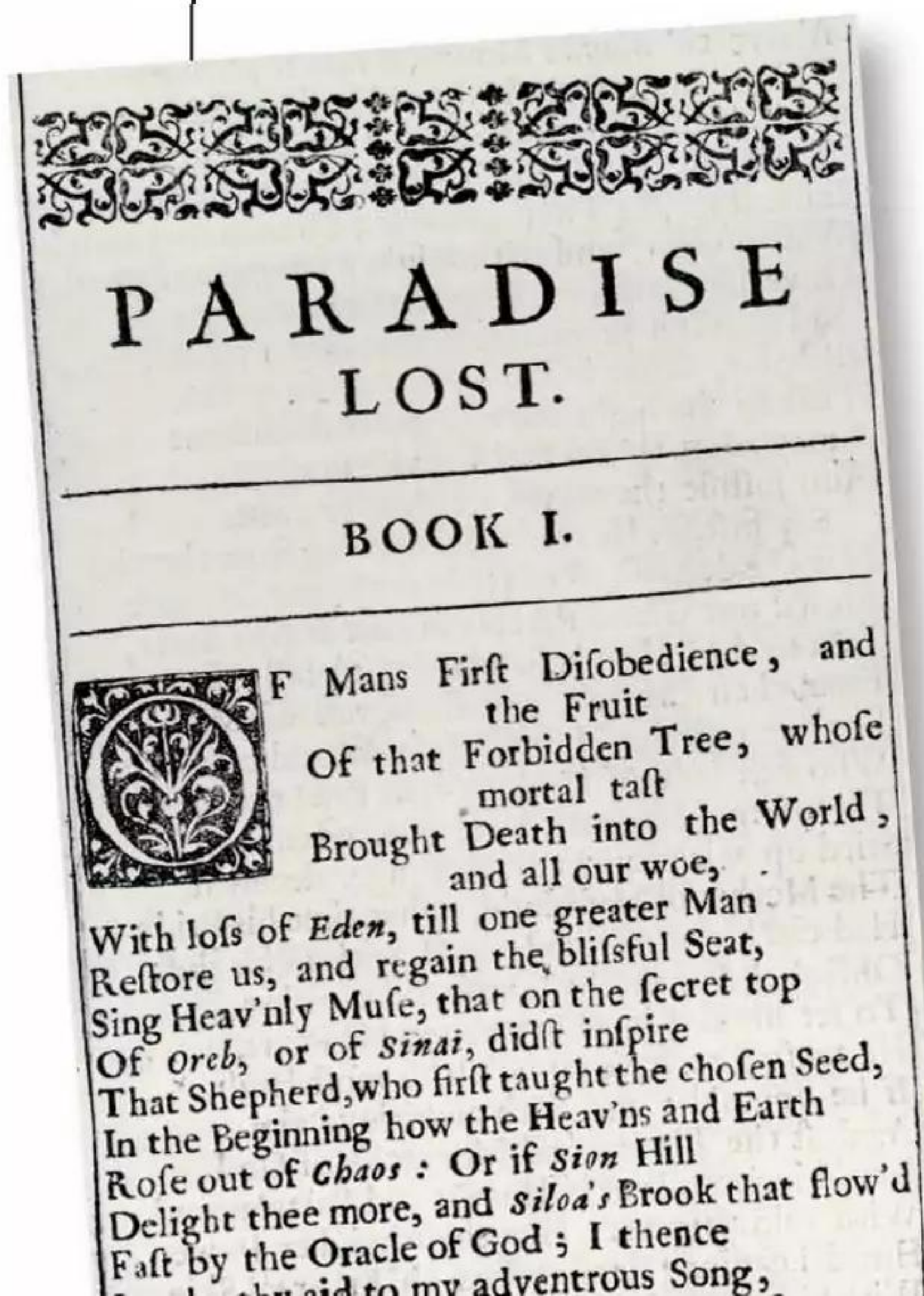
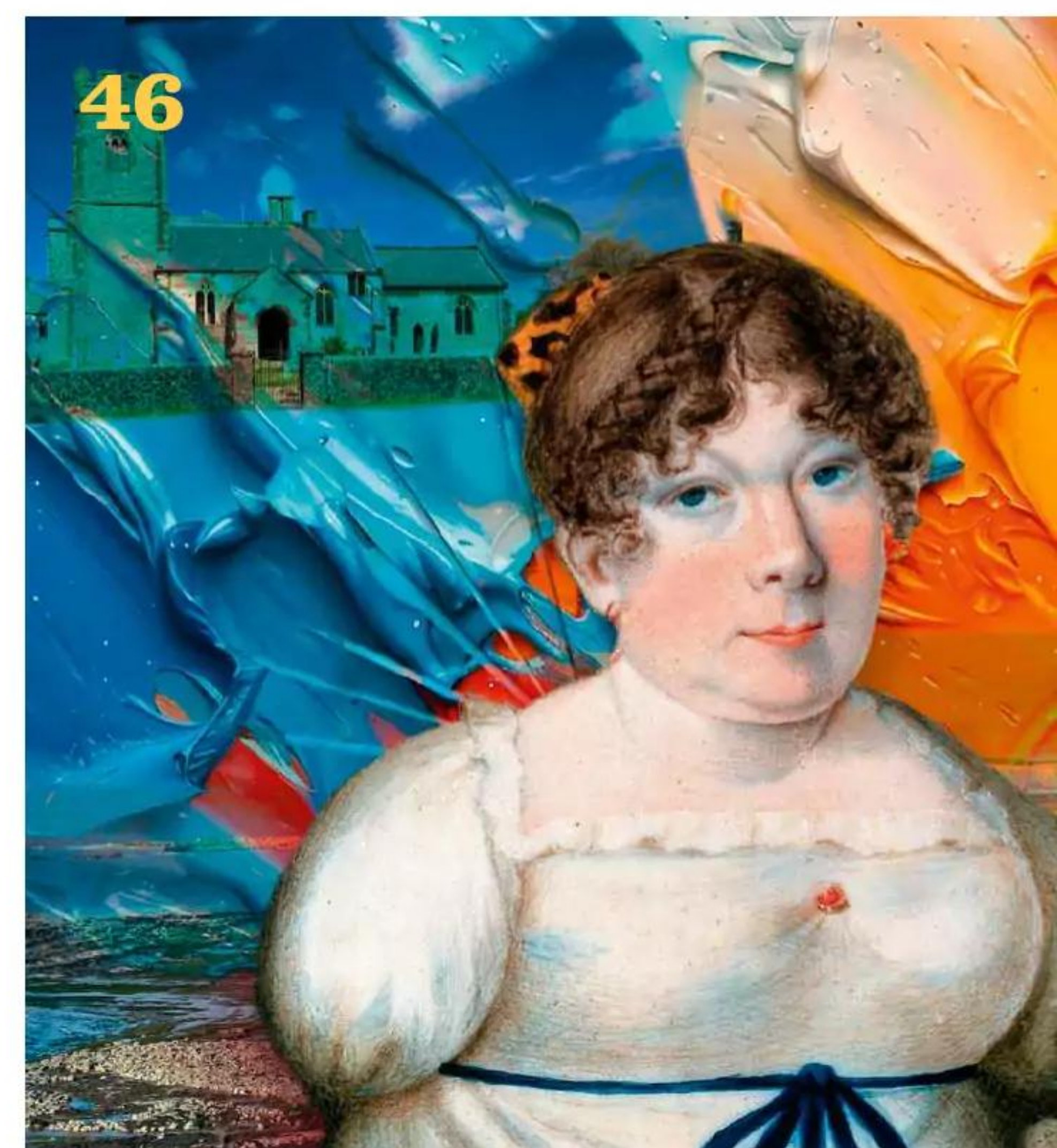
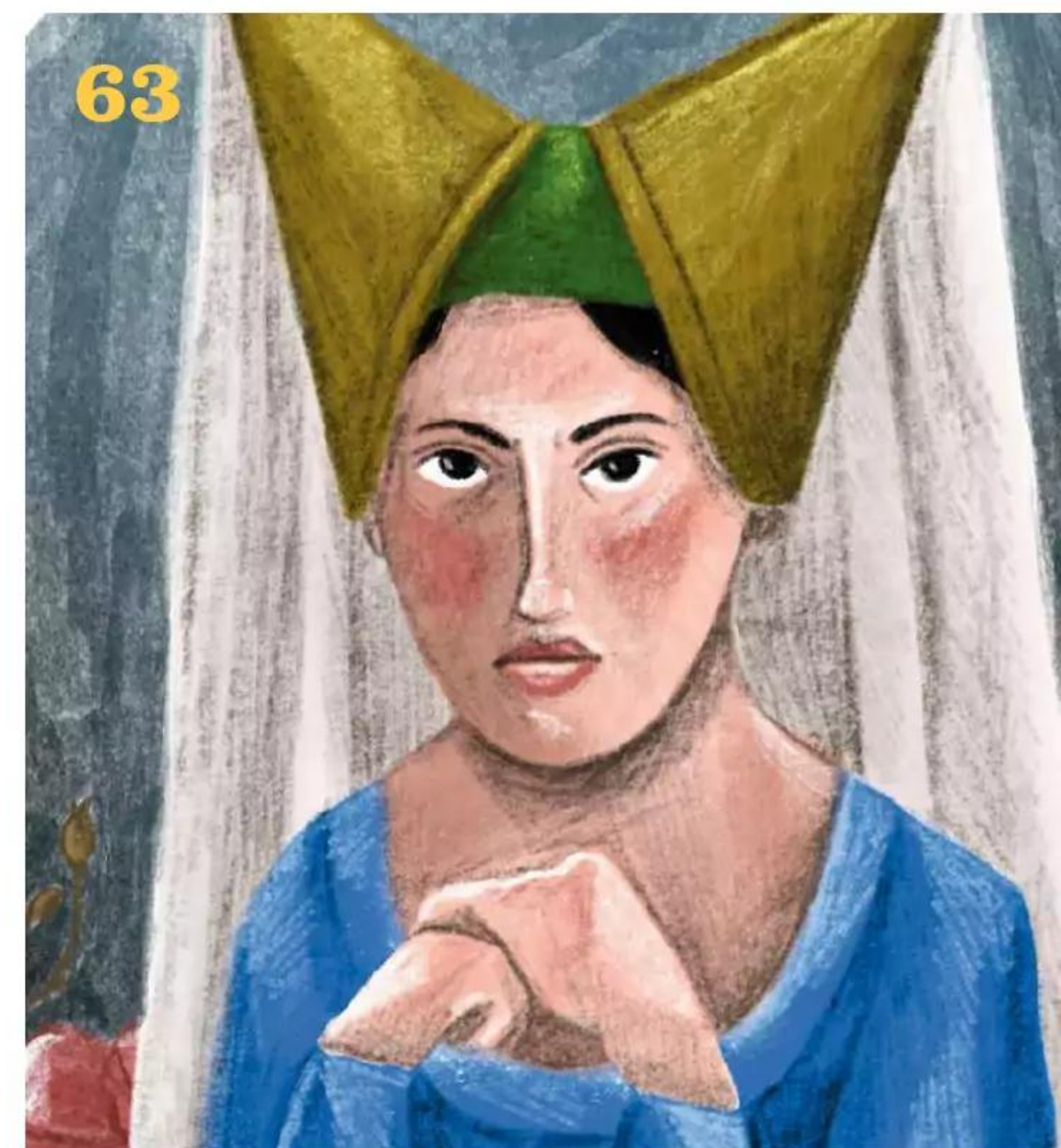
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ANNIVERSARIES

DANNY BIRD highlights events that took place in December in history

10 DECEMBER 1907

Animal-lovers and medics clash

The Brown Dog Riots bring disorder to Edwardian London

Days of urban unrest across central London hit boiling point on 10 December when around 400 rowdy medical students clashed with officers from the Metropolitan Police in Trafalgar Square. The cause of the mayhem? A memorial to a small dog.

The events later known as the Brown Dog Riots had their origins in 1903, when Dr William Bayliss, a distinguished physiologist, conducted a public vivisection on a small terrier – one of a series of procedures on the unfortunate stray.

Two animal rights activists who had been at the demonstration later claimed that the dog had not been anaesthetised, alleging cruelty. This claim was repeated by Stephen Coleridge, secretary of the National Anti-Vivisection Society – whom Bayliss successfully sued for libel, sparking a national controversy. Outraged animal rights advocates commissioned a statue, which was unveiled in 1906 in Battersea's Latchmere Recreation Ground, in tribute to the dog.

The sculpture soon became a flashpoint, attacked by medical students angered by its plaque – “Men and women of England, how long shall these Things be?” – which they felt insulted their profession. In November 1907, a group attempted to demolish the statue with sledgehammers, but their efforts were foiled, resulting in a £5 fine for the vandals.

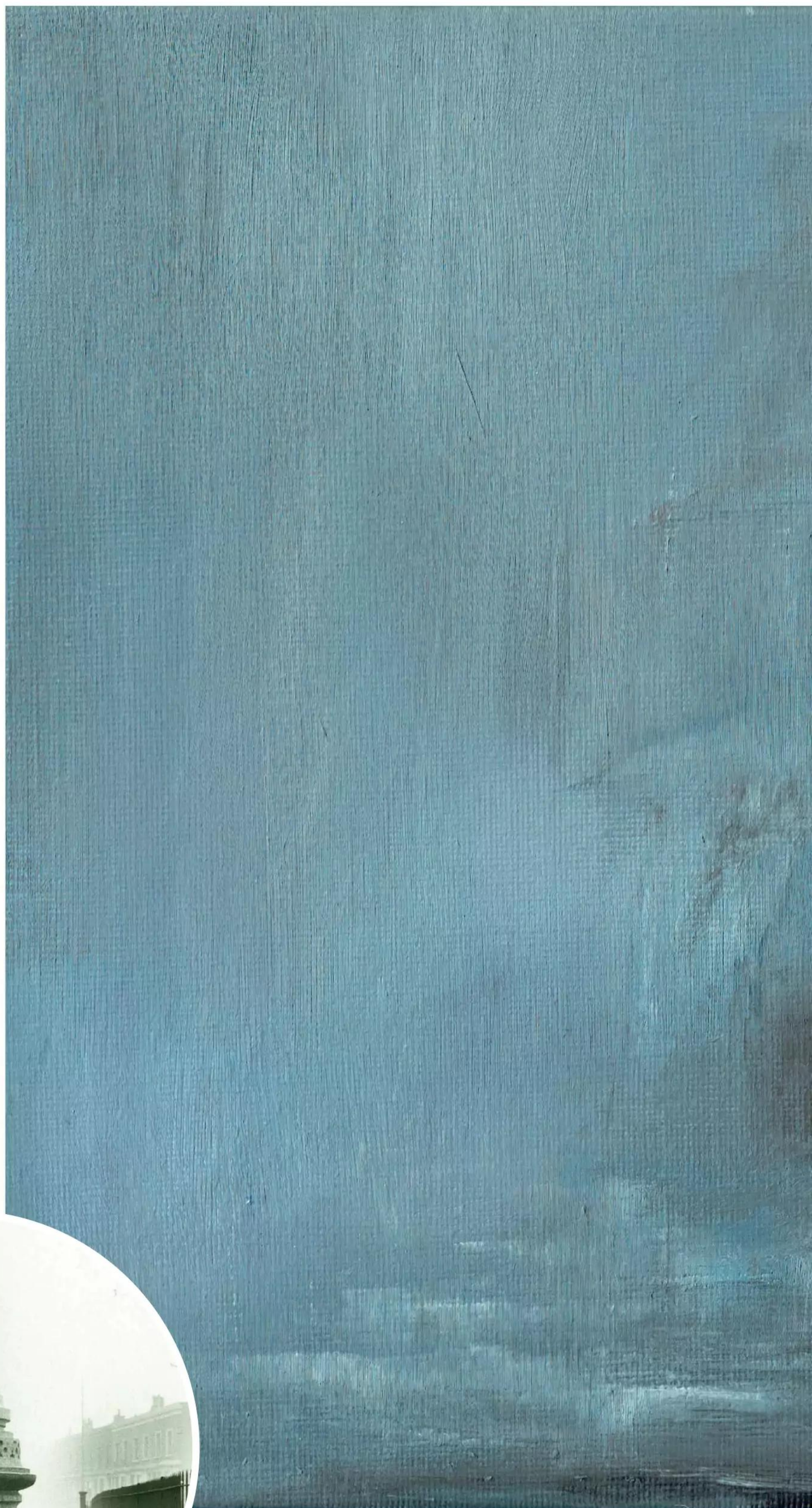
The legal crackdown only fuelled more protests. Medics from London's universities fomented mass disruption; they even targeted women's suffrage meetings, knowing that many suffragettes were anti-vivisectionists.

The riots culminated that December when medical and veterinary students converged in London, resulting in violent skirmishes. Finally, in 1910, Battersea Council had the statue removed.

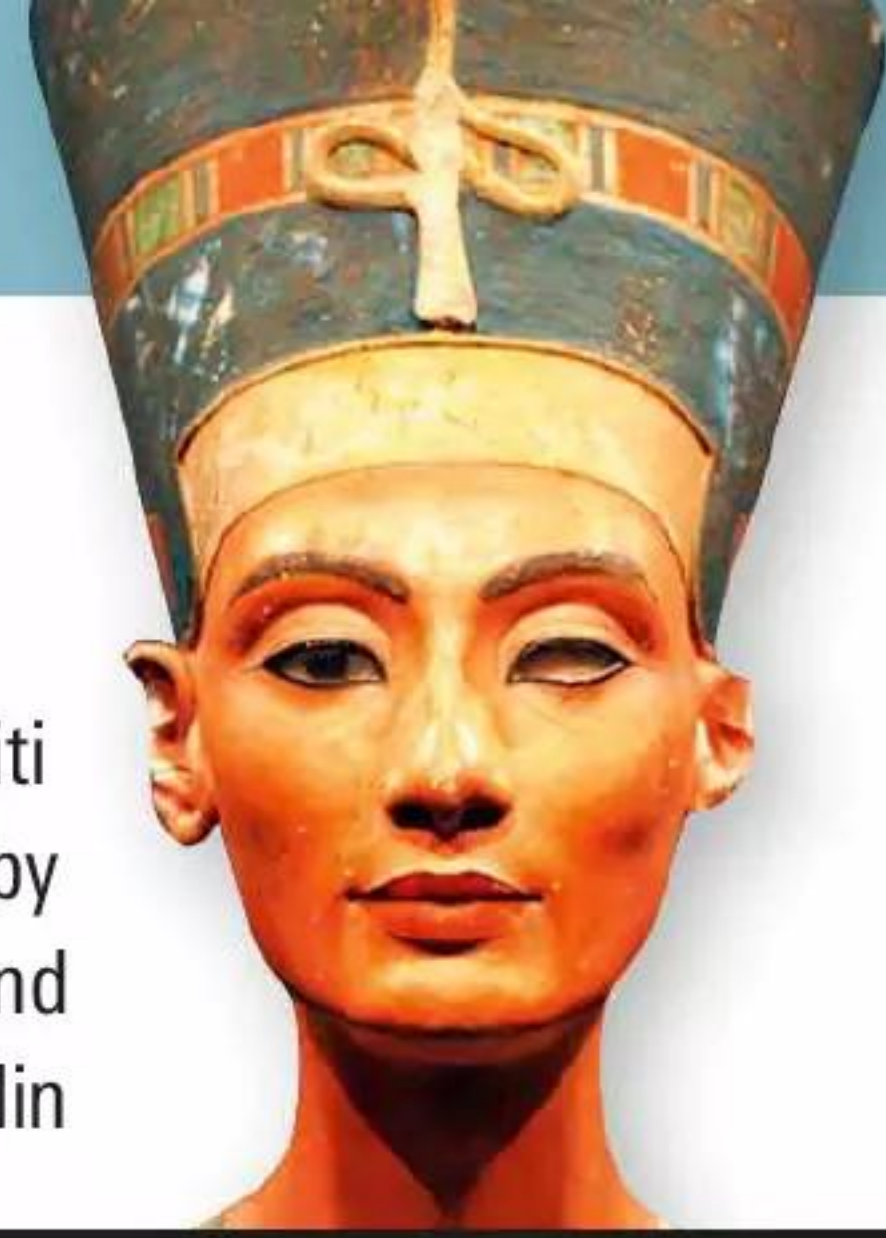
A statue in Battersea was erected in memory of the Brown Dog, which was subjected to a controversial vivisection in 1903



BRIDGEMAN/GETTY IMAGES



The bust of Queen Nefertiti was discovered in Egypt by a German archaeologist and has since been kept in Berlin



6 DECEMBER 1912

German archaeologist Ludwig Borchardt unearths the bust of Queen Nefertiti in Amarna, Egypt. The limestone sculpture, stunning in its beauty and craftsmanship, later captures global attention, becoming an iconic symbol of ancient Egyptian art and culture.

The *Mary Celeste* was found abandoned in 1872, and the mystery of the ghost ship has since sparked many paintings, stories and films

5 DECEMBER 1872

The Mary Celeste is sighted – empty

A ghost ship in the Atlantic spawns an unsolved mystery

On a choppy afternoon in the North Atlantic, some 400 miles east of the Azores, the crew of the brigantine *Dei Gratia* spotted what appeared to be a ship adrift at full sail. After the erratic vessel issued no response to the *Dei Gratia*'s signals, Captain David Morehouse sailed closer. There was no sign of anybody on board the ship, which the British crew identified from its stern as the *Mary Celeste*.

Upon boarding it, Morehouse and his men established that the *Mary Celeste* was indeed abandoned. Despite some damage to its rigging and about three and a half feet of seawater below decks, the ship was in sound condition. The main hatch was secure, its rations plentiful and the personal belongings of its crew were everywhere. However, the absence of a lifeboat seemed to indicate that an emergency had befallen them.

Delving deeper, Morehouse located the *Mary Celeste*'s logbook. Its last entry was dated 25 November 1872 and recorded the ship's location as being 6 nautical miles (11km) off the Azorean island of Santa Maria. With no indication of violence, fire or any other mishap, the whereabouts of the ship's passengers was baffling. Morehouse decided to salvage the vessel and sail it to Gibraltar, approximately 800 nautical miles away.

The *Mary Celeste* had originally set sail from New York City four weeks earlier, on 7 November, bound for Genoa. It was carrying 1,700 barrels of alcohol and 10 passengers, including Captain Benjamin Briggs, his wife, Sarah, and their baby daughter, Sophia.

When the ship eventually arrived, without its original passengers and crew, in Gibraltar on 12 December, British authorities launched a formal investigation. They concluded that there was no evidence of foul play.

To this day, the unexplained disappearance continues to generate intrigue. Over the years, everything from a giant octopus, pirates, waterspouts and the ignition of alcoholic fumes have been ventured as explanations.

2 DECEMBER 1851

President Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte launches a coup in France. The French National Assembly is dissolved, the constitution suspended and all opposition crushed. Backed by the army, Bonaparte enforces authoritarian rule, declaring himself Emperor Napoleon III exactly a year later.



Napoleon III, seen here in an official portrait from 1853, was emperor of France from 1852 to 1870

**7 DECEMBER 43 BC**

Cicero is assassinated

Ancient Rome's greatest orator is silenced by Mark Antony

As the final weeks of 43 BC played out, Marcus Tullius Cicero knew his life was in peril. In December, he attempted to flee his villa outside Formiae (halfway between Rome and Naples) for the coast. But fate caught up with the man

widely considered to have been the Roman Republic's most eloquent orator, and he was intercepted by two soldiers sent to kill him.

According to the historian Plutarch, Cicero's whereabouts were betrayed by someone within his own household after the assassins – a centurion named Herennius and a tribune called Popilius – stormed the villa. When the two men caught up with Cicero's entourage, on a wooded path leading to the sea, his determination to evade them folded and he instructed his attendants to place his litter down.

The historian Aufidius Bassus, consistent with other sources, records that Cicero said to his killers: "I go no further: approach, veteran soldier, and, if you can at least do so much properly, sever this neck."

With that, Cicero was decapitated, aged 63. Yet, as Livy attests, the assassins had a specific and gruesome trophy to procure: "They cut off his hands too, reviling them for having written something against Antony."

That 'something' was a series of 14 blistering speeches delivered in the senate and directed against the military strongman Mark Antony. From September 44 to April 43 BC, Cicero had mobilised his talent for oratory through diatribes known as the *Philippics*, so called as they were thought to emulate the rhetoric wielded by Demosthenes of Athens against the tyranny of Philip II of Macedon some 300 years earlier.

Cicero's vendetta against Antony sprang from his concern that Julius Caesar's right-hand man was a tyrant on the make.

In a symbolic photograph, Rosa Parks sits at the front of a bus in Alabama, in front of journalist Nicholas Chriss



1 DECEMBER 1955

African-American seamstress Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery bus. Her subsequent arrest sparks a city-wide bus boycott, inspiring protests and challenging racial segregation laws in the struggle for civil rights.



After Antony forged an alliance with Caesar's heir, Octavian, and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, in autumn 43 BC, the trio moved to destroy their enemies. Unsurprisingly, Cicero was at the top of Antony's list of 'proscriptions'.

Following his assassination, Cicero's hands and head were displayed on the *rostra* – the speakers' platform – in the Roman Forum. Legend has it that Fulvia, Antony's wife – who loathed Cicero for humiliating both him and her first husband, Clodius – visited the macabre scene and stabbed Cicero's tongue with hairpins, symbolically silencing him.

Still, Cicero had the last word in his final *Philippic*: "Brief is the life given us by nature; but the memory of life nobly resigned is everlasting."

GETTY IMAGES/JALAMY



Nyköping Castle in southern Sweden was the location of a legendary act of revenge

10-11 DECEMBER 1317

Royal sibling rivalry turns deadly in Sweden

The king takes bitter revenge at a banquet in Nyköping

The appetiser to the Nyköping Banquet had been years in the making. Three princely brothers, all sons of King Magnus Ladulås, had long vied for control over Sweden following the death of their father in 1290. Birger, the eldest, became king – but his ambitious brothers, Erik and Valdemar, later made a bid for power.

During the so-called 'Håtuna games' conflict of 1306, they ousted Birger and incarcerated him with his consort, Martha of Denmark, beneath Nyköping Castle in southern Sweden. Two years later, Erik and Valdemar's dynastic designs in Scandinavia resulted in tensions with Denmark and Norway, who eventually enforced a settlement that secured Birger's release.

Though ostensibly reconciled, Birger began plotting his vengeance. On the night of 10 December 1317, he invited Erik and Valdemar to a grand banquet at the very castle where he'd been prisoner. Following a lavish feast, which had seen the brothers treated cordially,

the trap was sprung.

According to a 14th-century Swedish masterpiece known as *Eric's Chronicle*, Birger is said to have asked his brothers: "Do you remember the Håtuna games? I remember it very well." They were then shackled and taken to the dungeon. Their extremities and necks were bound within iron manacles, restricting all movement.

Both died in the castle dungeon, likely from starvation. Legend has it that Birger threw the dungeon key into the nearby river, where it was miraculously fished out centuries later.

However, Birger's revenge ultimately backfired. His brutal treatment of the dukes outraged the Swedish nobility, sparking a rebellion that forced him to flee to Denmark where he died in 1321. Centuries later, the Nyköping Banquet remains a grisly tale of sibling rivalry taken to its limit. **H**

Danny Bird is content producer on *BBC History Magazine*

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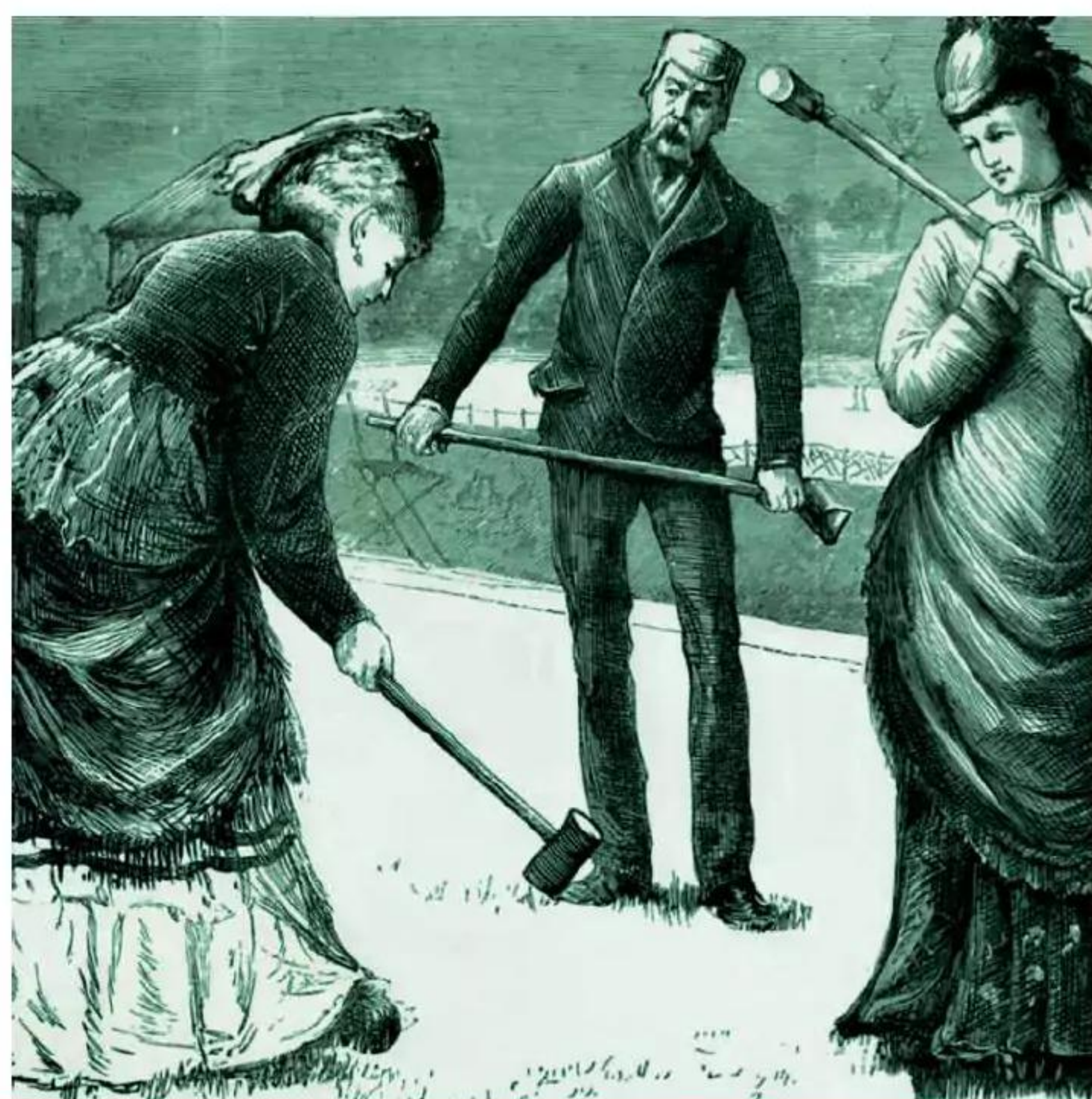
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THE CONVERSATION

EXPERTS DEBATE HISTORY'S BIGGEST ISSUES



ILLUSTRATION BY **HUGH COWLING**

THE BIG QUESTIONS

What does history say about the climate crisis?



Historian **PETER FRANKOPAN** and broadcaster and campaigner **CHRIS PACKHAM** discuss how the past could help us tackle today's environmental challenges – and how experts can work together to get their message across



INTERVIEW BY **MATT ELTON**

Matt Elton Peter and Chris, you're both leading voices in your fields, and I'm sure you'll have questions for each other as we go along – but I wanted to start with two of my own. First, Peter, your book *The Earth Transformed* charts the dramatic ways in which climate has shaped humanity across centuries. How can looking to the past help inform our view of climate change?

Peter Frankopan History starts for most of us in the primary-school classroom, with lessons about ancient civilisations, major world events, and the horrors and joys of humanity. But it's vital to remember this planet existed long before humans arrived.

Because we prioritise humanity, we forget the most vital lesson of all: that nature doesn't really care whether we're here in 100 years or 1,000 years. If we exceed our environmental boundaries, it's game over – and we should be thinking about that seriously, because the world around us is changing incredibly fast.

Indeed, although some of the crises we're facing at the moment – a warming world, changing weather patterns, and issues of sustainability and biodiversity – aren't happening for the first time, the challenge is that history shows us that they are taking effect much faster than in any earlier era.

Chris, how important do you think history is in our relationship with the natural world? Do history, heritage and conservation go hand in hand?

Chris Packham I think they do. History has always provided contemporary context, telling us who we are and how we got here. I've always looked to history to understand our position today. I think where Peter's book excels is in its exploration of the impact of climate and biodiversity loss, that cycle of ills which has impacted on the planet for such a long time. It looks at how these complex factors have influenced the

// All those great cities of the past that exceeded their boundaries disappeared. Civilisations come and go – and there are reasons for that //

PETER FRANKOPAN

development of civilisations, not just in terms of day-to-day lives but also wider forces such as economics and agriculture.

It's also quite terrifying, because over the course of even our recent history, planetary forces have played significant roles in shaping where we find ourselves today. To neglect that is, I think, foolhardy, because it underlines our absolute fragility. We are so overconfident that this world has been built for us, that we can abuse it however we like, and that it will be robust enough to soak up our mistreatment. That simply isn't true. We can see that we are in deep trouble – because we've been there many times before.

PF Climates have changed so often, and there have been catastrophes in the past. People sometimes say, well, maybe that tells us that everything will be fine. But it's almost the opposite: all those great cities of the past that exceeded their boundaries disappeared, after all. Civilisations come and go – and there are reasons for that.

A warming world is really bad if you're a human being, but great if you're an emerging infectious disease that thrives on individuals living closer together than ever. Then there are the pressures we're putting on resources. I don't think we realise the escalating cascade of effects of these things – just how close we are to the precipice.

My job is to explain how we got there, while people such as Chris are trying to work out how we pull back from the edge. And we have to do so in a way that's hopeful – because if you tell everyone we're all going to burn to a crisp, you scare people and shut down dialogue.

The conversation around climate and environmental change seems to antagonise some people, rather than helping them accept it. Chris, why do you think people get so worked up about data, statistics and the challenges of environmental change?

CP I think you used the key word there: change. Our species is remarkable, and our intelligence, adaptability and creativity are profound. But while we are very good at cure, we're not so good at prevention. We usually need to get kicked in the teeth, either by the planet or by ourselves, before we start to put things back together.

A classic example is the Second World War, which caused huge global stress – but look at the inventiveness used to overcome its problems. A more recent example is the coronavirus outbreak: we knew we were vulnerable to a pandemic, but did absolutely nothing to guard against it. Tragically, millions died – but within eight months we developed a vaccine that saved millions more.

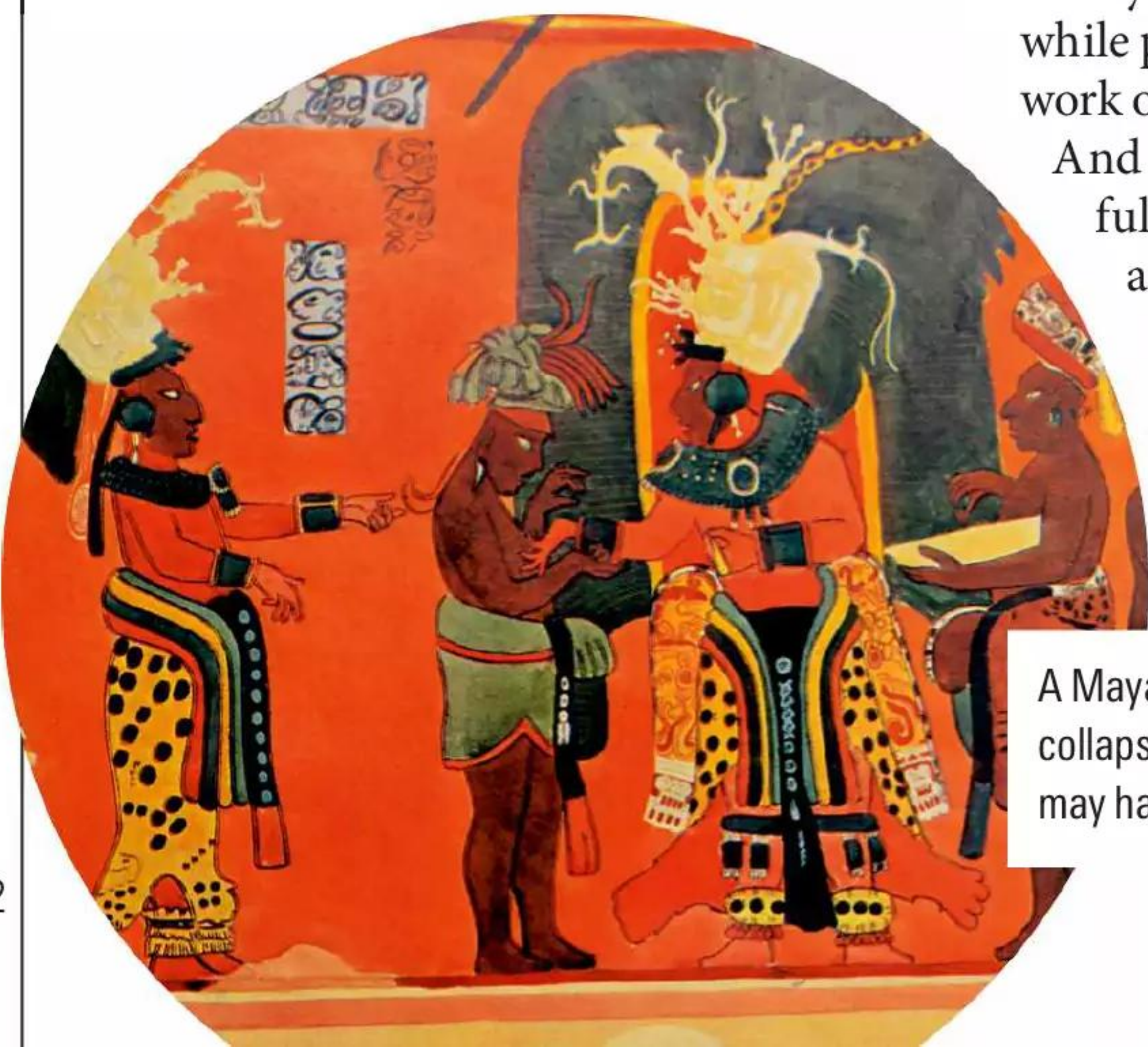
For all those great aspects of humanity, we're not very good at change. We like the status quo. We like what we've grown into. We will tolerate inefficiency, threat and fear – though we'll try to suppress the latter.

I don't mind fear, actually, because it's a very good motivator. In the natural world, it means one of only two things: fight or flight. But for all Elon Musk's endeavours, we're not leaving this planet any time soon. So we've got to fight to maintain it as a viable place to live – which is vital, because I don't think it will look anything like it does now, or has done for the past few hundred years.

Going back to another point you introduced, Peter, only 1 per cent of the species that have ever lived on Earth survive today. Extinction is an essential part of evolution, and the arrogant idea that we can shape all of this to our advantage just isn't correct.

PF When I was writing the book, one of the issues I considered was how people thought about biodiversity loss and sustainability in the past. Some of the first texts ever written were worried about resources and change. The Genesis story of Adam and Eve is an environmental parable, for instance. All is perfect in the garden of Eden. The good lord provides everything you need, with one simple instruction: don't be selfish. God's punishment for us not respecting the world is that we have to grow crops among the weeds and face floods, droughts and famines.

So much of the earliest writing is about our relationship with the natural world. It was a real revelation to think that the same questions we ask today were faced by our common ancestors for thousands of years.



A Maya fresco at Bonampak, Mexico. The collapse of the classic Maya civilisation may have been driven by climate change



British empire troops in ravaged land during the battle of Passchendaele, October 1917. World wars caused global stress – but also inventive thinking, says Chris Packham

Do you think there are ways in which history can help get these messages across?

CP We draw upon history in a simplistic way. We frequently contrast environmental activism with that of the civil rights movement, the suffragettes, or the anti-apartheid movement, but highlight non-violent direct action and tend to forget there was quite a lot of violence in those movements as well.

We also need to think further back and look at how planetary forces and climate, as well as humans and other species, have had an impact on the development of civilisations. A great revelation, reading Peter's book, was watching those twists and turns, and the way humans responded. The Little Ice Age [from the 14th to mid-19th century] in Europe set us back, for instance, but we overcame it. It wasn't just a matter of waiting for the climate to improve – it required a resourcefulness that we need to draw upon and find strength in again today.

PF Historians all cut our cloth in slightly different ways, and it's hard to be prescriptive. But questions we sometimes struggle with in universities are: what is our purpose? Is our priority writing for specialist academic researchers, teaching, to bring up the next generation of scholars, or engaging with the public? We are sometimes slightly uncomfortable about the best ways to get our ideas into the public domain.

There's also anxiety about the degree to which we should be involved in policy. Many of my colleagues don't think they should be, and would push back at the idea that you can learn lessons from historical episodes or devise policies around them as a result.

But one of the key things I've discovered is that people have a real appetite for history – and that's as true for environmental history as it is for the Tudors or the Silk Roads. People are hungry for ideas and to learn, so if you can engage with that, these kinds of conversations can flow from there.

Do you have heroes from history whose stories might help shape today's debates?

PF One of the things I tried to do in my book is to use as many people's voices as possible, because one of the wonders of

history is reading people's thoughts and views in their own words to get a sense of how people reacted to the problems of their day. Sometimes, the things they wrote or thought were wrong, and that's important too. There are lots of historical figures to whom I'm hugely sympathetic, rather than a single figure I look up to or who I think got everything right. So I'd dodge the question slightly by nominating a whole symphony orchestra of guest-star appearances rather than specific individuals.

CP I'm one of those kids who grew up reading [HG Wells's 1895 novel] *The Time Machine*, and have always fantasised about rubbing a lamp and a genie popping out to offer me three time trips. Obviously, I'd love to see a Tyrannosaurus Rex – the greatest animal that's ever lived. I'd also love to know precisely what happened at the end of the [19th-century] battle of the Little Bighorn. But my third wish would be to go into the future to see which players in contemporary humanity will be regarded as heroes. And, of course, I'm going to say that they will be the individuals such as [Swedish environmental activist] Greta Thunberg: the young woman who spoke so forthrightly to people across the world back in 2019 and 2020 when we really needed a wake-up call. I fantasise about going into Parliament Square and seeing who has replaced the statue of Churchill.

// We normally need to get kicked in the teeth, either by the planet or by ourselves, before we put things back together //

CHRIS PACKHAM



A central Asian nomad in a medieval Chinese painting. Non-sedentary peoples tend to be good custodians of ecosystems, says Peter Frankopan



Are historians part of the problem? Hear the full discussion between Peter Frankopan and Chris Packham on our podcast: historyextra.com/packham-frankopan



Peter, you write that “there are vast regions, periods and peoples that receive little attention” in the history of the environment. Which aspects are overlooked?

PF Indigenous peoples are largely written out of history – yet, all around the world, such peoples tend to have been incredibly careful conservators of their ecosystems. And that’s not just because I feel that’s a nice thing to say – it’s measurable.

These groups have had to respond to change very quickly, and have tended to do so in very practical ways. They have a good understanding of how sustainability works – but that rarely gets highlighted except by groups such as [human-rights charity] Survival International.

One of my current bugbears is the fact that nature conservation often involves setting up game reserves, which can involve booting people out. In Tanzania and Kenya, for example, Maasai have been pushed out of lands they’ve inhabited for millennia, as have Baka people in central Africa. Part of the conservation movement says that the only natural world that’s perfect is one that humans don’t get to touch, but humans and the natural world can live side by side.

Working on Silk Roads, central Asia and nomadism, I’ve explored the ways in which non-city-based peoples and their lifestyles have been important in history. Nomadic or non-sedentary peoples have been written about in denigrating ways, as savage or brutal. But many of the products we need in cities come from places far away from urban centres, and we tend not to think about the people who are making and growing them.

The word ‘civilisation’ comes from the Latin *civilis*, referring to people who live in

// I’m a pragmatist, and I know we can’t continue to live on the planet in the way we do now //

CHRIS PACKHAM

cities, and we concentrate too much on those in ivory towers or centres of power – usually men, and usually wealthy. It can be a challenge to write about different regions and people in an engaging way, but it’s vital to be reminded that there are lots of different ways we live on this beautiful planet, and that we should explore all of them.

CP One of the most interesting things in Peter’s book is that when the supercontinent Pangaea broke up, mammal fauna that arose in the Americas were different from those in Asia, Africa and Europe. There was greater diversity to draw upon when domesticating mammals in those latter regions, and that enabled greater access to food. That in turn gave rise to the classical civilisations, which had written cultures long before those in the Americas. So the story of which aspects of the past we focus on comes down to biology.

PF That’s exactly right. The fact that we had horses, camels or other animals that could enable us to connect quicker to each other, carry goods, help sow and mill crops and so

on, meant that how societies developed in the Americas – where there weren’t horses – was different from in Europe and Asia.

Around 94 per cent of history faculties in the UK focus on the history of the west. This partly reflects the attitude espoused by one of Britain’s most famous historians, [19th-century writer and politician] Thomas Babington Macaulay, who wrote that “a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia”.

Those legacies have contributed to aspects of environmental history and climate negotiations we struggle with today. How should the west deal with the fact that we burned all of our coal in pursuit of industrial and political economic development – and parts of the world that haven’t had that boost say: now you’re telling *us* we need to be green and clean? The only way we can have those conversations is to respect other cultures, learn about them, and understand our role in their successes and weaknesses.

PF How optimistic are you that human ingenuity, technology and lessons from the past can provide hope for the future, Chris?

CP I’m a pragmatist, and I know we can’t continue to live on the planet in the way we do now. But I believe that the resourcefulness we can muster – our inventiveness and creativity – means humanity will survive.

Peter, were you tempted – given all the data you assembled – to look to the future?

PF Funnily enough, historians can be quite bad predictors of the future. It could be that, because we tend to deal in war and pestilence, we tend to be quite gloomy! I’ll let other people have a go at predicting the future. It just felt right to me, as a historian, to explain how we’ve got to where we are in 2024, and let people work out what they think comes next – and what they, their family, friends and communities, should be doing. As you know much better than I, Chris, we can all make our small changes. But if we can act in concert, then things start to look slightly more promising. **H**

Peter Frankopan is professor of global history at the University of Oxford, where he is senior research fellow at Worcester College. His most recent book is *The Earth Transformed: An Untold History* (Bloomsbury, 2023)

Chris Packham is a naturalist, television presenter, writer, photographer, conservationist and filmmaker whose BBC shows include *Springwatch* and the forthcoming *Evolution*



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Shared sacred space

Holy sites of multiple religions stud Jerusalem's skyline. "The competition of different faiths, cultures and civilisations is incredibly complex and intense," says Simon Sebag Montefiore

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES**

"The increasing ferocity of the Middle East conflict makes it harder and harder to tell this history"

Historian and broadcaster **SIMON SEBAG MONTEFIORE**'s updated biography of Jerusalem charts events right up to the present day. Why did he choose to examine such a contentious past? And is it possible to remain entirely impartial? Matt Elton caught up with him to find out

Matt Elton You've just published a new edition of your history of Jerusalem. What were your aims in updating it?

Simon Sebag Montefiore The book is a history of the Middle East, the Holy City and Holy Land across 3,000 years – from the Canaanites to the 2020s, encompassing all faiths, all religions, all conquerors, all empires and all states. Where possible, it's mainly told through the stories of individuals.

The previous version of the book came out in 2011, and largely ended in 1948 – though it did include a brief section on the Israeli conquest of Jerusalem in the Six-Day War of 1967. So its coverage of the 20th century was incomplete, which seemed okay when I wrote it – but so much has happened since then that I began to think I should update it.

I was in the process of doing that when the attack by Hamas in southern Israel happened on 7 October last year. Since then

there's been such a deluge of misinformation and, frankly, ignorance and bias from all directions that it seemed even more urgent – particularly because, in the 10 months after that attack, the book sold out many times in Britain and the US.

For better or worse, the book is one of the few balanced accounts that attempts to tell the story of the creation of the Israeli nation and the Palestinian nation. Nothing is perfect, of course, and it would be hubristic

SHUTTERSTOCK



and arrogant to think that anyone could write a perfectly balanced history. But I think this is as close as it gets.

This is among the most contested areas of world history, so how did you navigate the process of writing this book in a balanced way, fending off potential accusations of bias – from all sides?

First, you have the manuscript read by experts on both sides, who will hopefully advise you if you've got something wrong. But it's also a matter of respect. When writing any book, if I recognise a preconception I have, I try to wipe it out and start looking at the evidence both ways.

The tragedy of the Holy City and the Holy Land is that, historically, this was always an incredibly cosmopolitan area – a multi-ethnic, multi-faith patchwork that developed across thousands of years. So it's deeply depressing to chronicle the increasingly binary nature of what's happening today: the way in which the other ethnic groups have been forgotten in this story, which has been reduced to this terrible battle between Israelis and Palestinians, each with their own version of history.

So I've read everything I can on all dimensions of these subjects. I've aimed to ensure that all narratives are respected and, wherever possible, I've set out to get as close as possible to what really happened – even if it offends both sides. And hopefully this book *will* offend both sides. As I say, I don't underestimate how difficult it is to satisfy everybody. The increasing ferocity of the conflict in our times also makes it harder and harder to tell this history – but this is a very serious effort to do so.

While writing this book, I had a piece of paper next to me on the desk – a story about the first British governor of Jerusalem, Ronald Storrs. When he arrived in Jerusalem [as military governor] in 1917, he was initially quite popular – with Arabs, Christians, Jews,

Muslims, everyone – but within a few months he was hated by all sides. So he went back to London to see the prime minister, David Lloyd George, and said: "I just have to resign." And the PM replied: "Well, you've got to carry on with your job – but as soon as any one side stops hating you, I'll sack you." That story, I think, sums up the challenge of writing a history of Jerusalem.

In the new section, you write: "If this book has any mission, I passionately hope that it might encourage each side to recognise the ancient heritage of the other." Can you expand on what you mean by this?

If you look at a social-media site such as X [formerly Twitter], you're constantly reading posts written from ultra-nationalist Israeli or ultra-nationalist Palestinian viewpoints, denying the history of the other in Jerusalem and in the wider Holy Land. There are also many pro-Israeli histories that minimise the real story of the Islamic presence, and many pro-Palestinian histories that make all sorts of bizarre claims about ancient history and the very existence of the first and second Jewish Temples.

Amid all this, I'm trying to get as close as possible to what really happened. And at the very heart of the story is the Temple Mount, also known as Haram al-Sharif, around which the competition of different faiths, cultures and civilisations is incredibly complex and intense. This site has been home to such a range of different places of worship – and provides just one example of the need to get a very complex story absolutely correct.

You asked at the start of our conversation about what I set out to do with this new version. Well, of course,

missing from the 2011 edition were all of the characters from the past 50 years that we now think of as being massively important: [Palestinian leader] Yasser Arafat, [Israeli general and prime minister] Ariel Sharon, [Syrian president] Bashar Assad, [current Israeli prime minister] Benjamin Netanyahu and Saddam Hussein, right up to Joe Biden.

As well as bringing the story up to date, I also wanted to set the Holy City



Key characters Pivotal political figures from the past half-century feature in Montefiore's updated book, including (from top) former Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, shown in 1969; Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, in 1997; and current Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu

// Historically, the Holy Land was always an incredibly cosmopolitan area – a multi-ethnic, multi-faith patchwork //



Ronald Storrs, military governor of Jerusalem, in 1920. Aiming to protect the rights of multiple peoples, he became hated by all sides



Religious accord A 14th-century illustration of Frederick II meeting Ayyubid Sultan al-Kāmil. Though the encounter never occurred, the two sides did peacefully agree to divide Jerusalem between the religions in 1229



Street life An entrance into Jerusalem's Old City. Benjamin Disraeli claimed that the history of the city is the history of the world

// History has always mattered – that's why figures such as Stalin and Mao tried to supervise which stories are told //

and the Holy Land into the context of the wider region – because it's impossible to understand the creation of the modern Middle East without understanding the region. All of its modern states were created at the same time, essentially by the colonial powers, and most had never existed before.

Does setting this recent history into a longer narrative sweep reveal any continuities or echoes?

An episode that I recount in the earlier section of the book is the peace deal between Ayyubid Sultan al-Kāmil and Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor and king of Jerusalem, who in 1229 agreed to divide the city between the religions. It's one of several examples from across the centuries that I think can provide inspiration to us today – showing that these kinds of things have been attempted in different eras.

Your recent conversation on X with fellow historian William Dalrymple, in which you disagreed on an aspect of Middle Eastern history, was praised for remaining cordial. How unusual is that kind of civil online discourse when discussing complex historical subjects?

It's very unusual – but, of course, the internet is the *worst* forum on which to discuss the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Social media is the very last place where peace will ever be negotiated, because social media – and its algorithms specifically – are created to enrage and provoke, and to funnel people into echo chambers and concrete, fortified positions. So it's almost impossible to understand a complex historical subject such as the Middle East and its nuances on that kind of digital platform.

William and I have known each other for almost 40 years, and decided there was no point in falling out now – because so many people *have* fallen out over this subject. The only way it's going to work is if people learn about each other and respect their narratives. That's the entire mission of the book. We're trying to set a small example of how being civil to one another, criticising each other in a polite way, can be done.

Do you think this increased division and intensification means historians increasingly find themselves on the front line?

I do think many of us feel like we're involved in some kind of battle. I also write about Russian history, and my history of the world

[2022's *The World: A Family History*] touched on empire and slavery – subjects that have become very fraught in recent years. Indeed, I think the two books are complementary. Benjamin Disraeli famously said that the history of Jerusalem is the history of the world, and while that's not quite true – eastern and southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa don't play any role in the history of Jerusalem, for instance – they overlap.

Of course, when you look to the past, you realise history has always mattered. That's why figures such as Stalin and Mao took history so seriously, and wrote books attempting to supervise which stories are told. One of the great influences on my writing is the [14th and 15th-century] north African Arab scholar Ibn Khaldun. His brother, also a historian, was assassinated by a fellow historian. And if you look to China, its great [second and first-century BC] historian Sima Qian was arrested by the emperor for criticising his rule. Offered the choice of execution or castration, Sima Qian chose the latter – so he could finish his book.

These stories show us that the writing of history has always been fraught. We think today's battles over history are unique, but it has been always thus. **H**

Simon Sebag Montefiore is a historian, author and broadcaster. The updated edition of *Jerusalem: The Biography – A History of the Middle East* is out now, published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson





MICHAEL WOOD ON... POCKET-SIZED WINDOWS ONTO A VANISHED WORLD

// Ladybird books have reflected the history of our times for over a century //

.....
Michael Wood
is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series. His latest book is *In the Footsteps of Du Fu* (Simon & Schuster, 2023). You'll find him on X at *MichaelWoodMV*

B B C

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, ONE OF MY FAVOURITE books was a Ladybird: *What to Look for in Winter*, first published in 1959. With its companions, *Spring*, *Summer* and *Autumn*, it constitutes a beautiful portrait of the natural world of Britain through the seasons, with pictures by one of the great 20th-century nature illustrators, CF Tunncliffe. Conceived a decade after the Second World War – and, therefore, already perhaps unknowingly tinged with nostalgia – it remains a delight. Turning its pages now, 65 years on, seems all the more poignant as climate change alters our world forever.

I was reminded of this in the summer by a lovely exhibition of Ladybird books and artworks in St Albans. The exhibition has been travelling round the UK for the past few years, and will visit Peterborough Museum in the spring, then Ushaw, Durham in summer 2025.

The origins of Ladybirds lie in Henry Wills' bookshop, established in Loughborough in 1867. The company soon began publishing books, and the series miraculously survived all the ups and downs of publishing since then. The first titles under the Ladybird imprint were published in the summer of 1914, and they have given us pleasure and reflected the history of our times for over a century.

The golden age was 1940–75, when, first, children's stories were printed, then factual books: science, natural history, weather, birds, trees, wildflowers, butterflies and moths, the wildlife of coasts and estuaries – all featuring glorious paintings by some of our most brilliant illustrators.

History, of course, was a big thing. I daresay many readers of my generation enjoyed their first historical encounters in those slim little volumes on Alfred the Great, William the Conqueror, Magna Carta, Elizabeth I, Cromwell, Livingstone and Scott of the Antarctic.

Looking back on them now, these snapshots of 'Our Island Story' are nationalistic, white, largely male; kings such as Alfred are noble and merciful, and the empire is still a Good Thing. But then in those days, many historians still argued that Cromwell was a good guy, and we were only just beginning a serious engagement with the darker side of the national narrative. Nonetheless, I admit that I still can't quite shake off the image of Alfred the Great with quill pen and candle, wrestling with his translation of Boethius in between his battles with the Danes. Childhood stories stick with us like myths, don't they, imprinted on our adult imagination?

The Ladybirds were of their time, of course, as things always are. That was very obvious, for example, in gender issues: stereotypical images depicted a nuclear family in which dad was the breadwinner at work, mum the housewife at home, and Peter and Jane the kids with their gendered play – no football for girls!

Ladybirds were overtaken in the later 20th century by a huge expansion in children's publishing, but have lately enjoyed something of a renaissance. A Ladybird Expert series for adults has been launched, covering topics such as climate change, quantum mechanics and evolution, meeting a still urgent need for short expert guides to the crucial ideas of our time. You'd have to say that the slim little 56-page format, four-and-a-half by seven inches, slipping nicely into the pocket, is still perfect for an introductory book to be read on the bus back from school – that is, if you can put your smartphone away!

Which brings me back to *What to Look for in Winter*. It's a fantastically informative, expertly written text from which you can learn so much about soil and agriculture, the habitats and migrations of birds, the cycles of farming. Here is the mechanisation of the countryside, which accelerated after the Second World War. But this is still the world of gleaners, cowmen and potato pickers, of working horses, wayfaring trees and hay knives.

What strikes you, too, is the beauty of the landscapes: idealised, sure, but for a kid like me, born in a grey postwar inner city, these are the images that I hold in my mind when I think of mid-century rural Britain.

We have seen huge social changes since the Second World War, and a catastrophic decline in wildlife – birds, insects and other animals. These books provide insights into the social history of that extraordinarily expansive period between 1945 and 1980, when the horizons of the British people for a time opened up. But, wider still, they offer a minutely, lovingly observed portrait of the world we have lost. **H**





HIDDEN HISTORIES

KAVITA PURI on the repression of women's rights in Afghanistan

// Half the population live in a land where hopes cannot exist //

.....
Kavita Puri

is a journalist and broadcaster for BBC Radio 4. Her latest BBC Sounds podcast, *Three Million*, charts the 1943 Bengal Famine and won Gold in the New Podcast category at this year's British Podcast Awards



"IF WE CAN'T SPEAK, WHY EVEN LIVE? WE'RE like dead bodies moving around." These heartbreaking words were spoken by Shabana (not her real name) in a BBC report produced in September. She was responding to a new law from the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice Ministry – the Taliban's morality police in Afghanistan – decreeing that, when a woman is outside her home, her voice must not be heard. Even when she is in the home, nobody outside should be able to hear her speak. Other edicts included the command that women should stay at home unless the need to go out was "urgent" – and that, if they do go out, they must be completely covered in thick clothing. In June, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan called for gender apartheid to be criminalised under international law.

In the three years since the Taliban recaptured Kabul in 2021, it has issued numerous edicts removing women's freedoms. Whenever new restrictions have been imposed, small groups of women across Afghanistan have bravely taken to the streets, marching to demand the return of their rights. These protests have been violently suppressed.

In his book *War & Peace & War: Twenty Years in Afghanistan*, published by Bonnier Books in August, Andrew North has charted the two decades that followed the invasion launched by the US and its allies in the aftermath of the 11 September terrorist attacks. By the

end of 2001, the Taliban had been ousted from power, although military insurgency persisted. In the years that followed, rights were expanded. Girls attended school, women could take jobs and, despite persistent discrimination, women's rights were enshrined in the constitution.

North's book follows the story of Farzana from Herat. She refused to get married but instead, encouraged by her mother, studied law at university. After graduation, Farzana moved on her own to Kabul, where she worked as a legal adviser for US aid programmes and then the United Nations. As the security situation worsened, she moved her family to Kabul – she was earning enough to support them and to put her sister through her postgraduate studies – and even lived with her boyfriend for a while, a life that's now completely unthinkable for a woman. As the security situation deteriorated further, she lost friends and family members. While studying abroad, she claimed asylum and, when the Taliban returned to power in 2021, she arranged for her family to flee Afghanistan. A brief window of freedom was over.

"For many Afghan women, the return of the Taliban's theocracy represented a direct assault on every aspect of the life and identity they had built up over the past two decades," writes North. "But it was urban women who felt the reversal in their fortunes so acutely."

It was not always this way. Women had the right to vote for decades. In 1950, Afghanistan abolished the purdah system that enforced strict gender segregation and veiling practices, allowing women to participate more actively in public life. Through the 1960s, women's rights expanded. Photographs from that period show unveiled women with short hair, wearing western clothes. But these developments took place largely in the main cities. In rural areas, life for women did not change much.

Progress continued through the 1970s and after the Soviet invasion of 1979. In the civil war that ensued, however, Islamist Mujahideen rebels gradually gained control and, by the late 1990s, the Taliban controlled much of Afghanistan. Once again, women's freedoms were curtailed. They were forced to wear burqas and to be accompanied by men whenever they left the house, and their access to employment and education was restricted.

Afghanistan has endured so many decades of war and instability, but it is girls and women who have suffered most. Today, the most basic of freedoms enjoyed by most women around the world are not afforded to millions of Afghanistan's women. Hard-won rights have been trampled on. Since 2021, nearly all girls are denied education beyond the age of 11. Women cannot speak in public, let alone sing. It is a living hell for half the population, living in a land where even hopes and aspirations cannot exist – where women cannot feel the breeze on their skin or look up and see the sky. **H**



Three women in Kabul in 1972. At this time, some Afghan women enjoyed a considerable amount of freedom, which began to be curtailed with the growth of the Taliban during the 1990s

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LETTERS

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Sex and swearing

It was fascinating to relive, in *Anniversaries* (November), the moment in 1960 when Penguin Books won the right to publish an unexpurgated version of DH Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The decision sent shockwaves through British society by featuring a commonplace human activity and a four-letter word considered taboo – despite it being used frequently on these shores since at least the Middle Ages.

A similar uproar had occurred in 1914 when the character Eliza Doolittle uttered the line “Not bloody likely” in George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*.

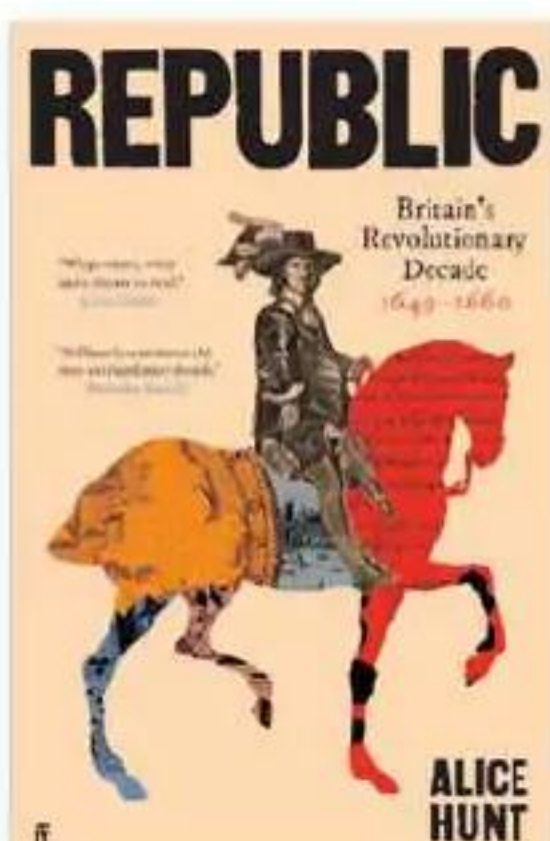
The difference in Lawrence's case, perhaps, was that a word that could always previously have had a deaf ear politely turned to it was now set down in the permanence of print in a book accessible and cheap enough for all to buy. It was considered so daring to see the word in black and white that millions of people rushed to enjoy the frisson of buying a copy.

The size of the seismic tremor unleashed can be gauged by the fact that it would still be another five years before critic Kenneth Tynan chose to speak the word, quite deliberately, on BBC television.

Ian MacDonald, Essex



Two women peruse a copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* outside a London bookshop, November 1960. Reader Ian MacDonald highlights the novel's cultural impact



We reward the Letter of the Month writer with a copy of a new book. This issue, that's **Republic: Britain's Revolutionary Decade, 1649–1660** by Alice Hunt. Read our review on page 74

Gender and violence

“What drives our addiction to war?” asks a perplexed Richard Overy in his *Think Piece* (October). Surely it's something to do with the fundamental nature of men, isn't it? Regardless of external factors, the vast majority of violence in society is perpetrated by men. The intrinsic need for, and often enjoyment of, exercising control over others through violence is a predominantly male preserve, and a shockingly unaddressed problem in most societies.

Give such men political power, and couple it with their often deep-seated psychological problems, and we see the inevitable results play out on the world stage. There are countless examples, but Adolf Hitler immediately comes to mind. Severely beaten throughout childhood by his brutal father, Hitler's resulting anger and resentment were then inflicted to catastrophic effect on millions of innocent people in the Second World War.

Though an imaginary world solely populated by women would inevitably be far from perfect, would it be the war-scarred dystopia we see today, with its endless recourse to violence and inestimable levels of human suffering? I suspect that might answer Richard Overy's question.

Lorna C Donohoe, Walthamstow

War: what is it good for?

In response to Richard Overy's excellent article, I'd like to add another reason for wars being enacted: leaders being able to think of the greater good for patriotic and global reasons. Despite his many personal faults and military misjudgments in the First World War, Winston Churchill surely drew on his vision for the world to beat an egotistical, evil dictator who many in the British cabinet wanted to do a deal with.

It is not difficult to draw comparisons between evil dictators from the past and those today. We can only hope that our leaders see the bigger picture, as Churchill did when he realised that an essential ally would again become an enemy responsible for a divided Europe, and that handling it would require diplomacy, deterrents and military strength. We can only hope, too, that our leaders have the same genuine objective to help humanity, rather than causing deaths due to their egos.

Keith Lodge, Hull

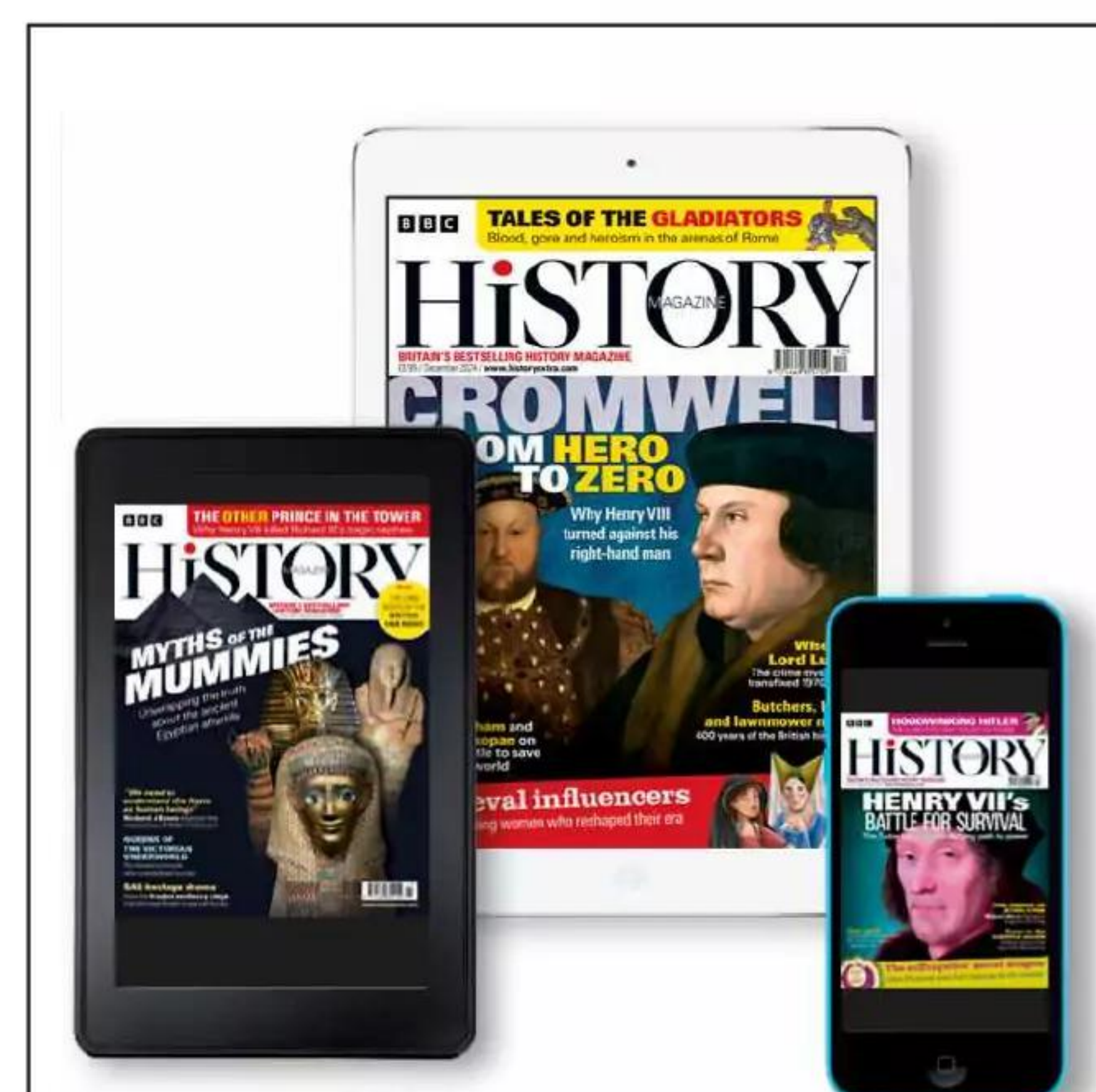
Memory wipe

I thoroughly enjoyed David Musgrove's well-researched article *Tales from the Toilet*



(October). No treatise on the subject of bottom wiping, however, is complete without reference to François Rabelais' work *Gargantua et Pantagruel*. Written in the early 1500s, *Gargantua* gives us a hilarious, detailed list of “torcheculs” (bottom wipers) he has tried – dozens of them – culminating in the one he found the best: a goose's neck, along with instructions for use.

I'd also like to add a footnote to the section of the article on communal toilets. I distinctly remember seeing an outside ‘two-seater’ in the 1940s, in a backyard in a



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► Page 54



A German armoured vehicle encounters a Soviet truck during the Second World War. Richard Overy's feature on humanity's propensity for violence sparked much reader discussion

poorer part of a north of England mining village. I don't think it was still in use communally, but it was still in use for private visits.
D Mason, Penicuik

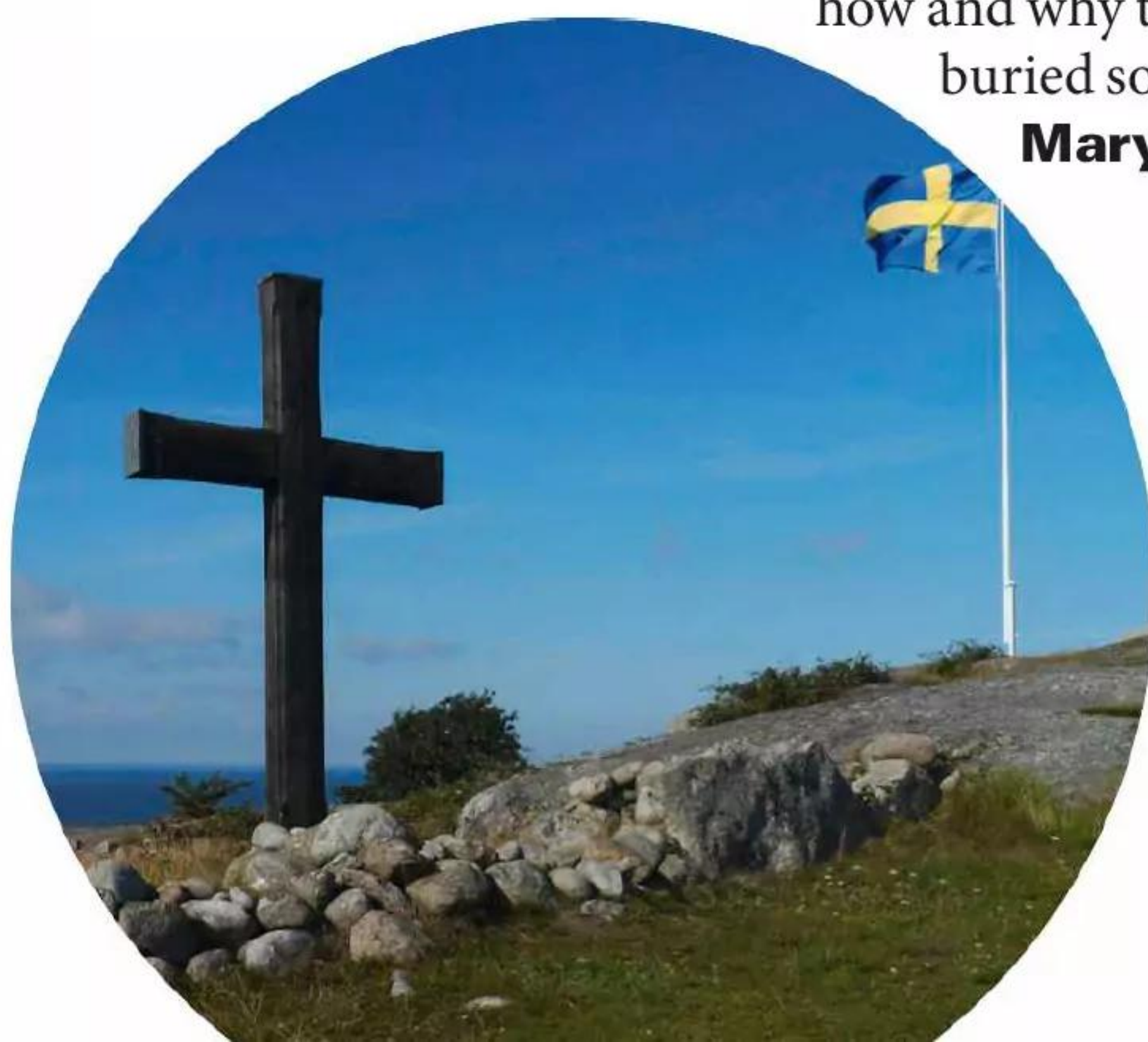
So far from home

I am writing to see if any of your readers can solve a mystery. When my husband, David, was serving as a Royal Navy CPO on board HMS *Plymouth*, the Admiralty had an unusual request. On the small island of Hanö, off the south-east coast of Sweden, there were the graves of a number of British sailors, thought to be from the Napoleonic Wars.

They were marked with simple wooden crosses, which were rotting. The Swedes wondered if the United Kingdom could provide a single large cross for the site. While on a courtesy visit to Sweden, a cross made in the Royal Dockyard in Plymouth was hoisted by helicopter onto the island. My husband said that all the local people came out on small boats, and he was able to make a cine film of the event.

Does anyone have any information about how and why these men came to be buried so far from home?

Mary Nunn, Devon



A number of British sailors are buried on the Swedish island of Hanö. Reader Mary Nunn wants to know why

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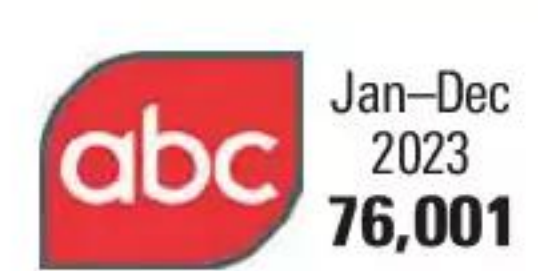
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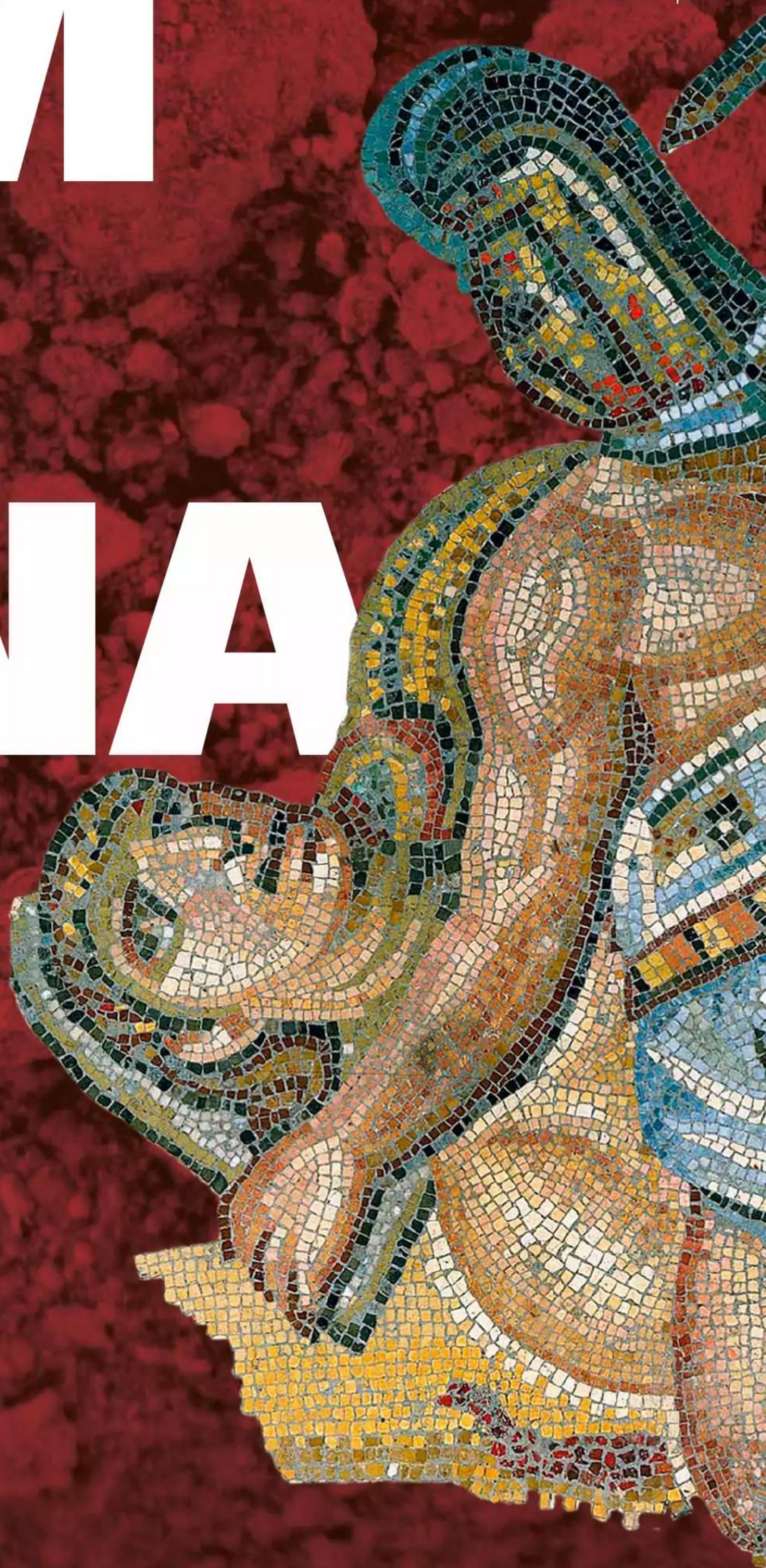
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TALES FROM THE ARENA

How did gladiators supercharge the rise of Julius Caesar? And why were they seen as sex symbols? As *Gladiator II* arrives in cinemas, **Guy de la Bédoyère** tells the story of this brutal form of mass entertainment through six of its most significant (and surprising) moments

TOPFOTO/DEAMSTIME





Gladiators do battle in a c320 AD mosaic. By the imperial age, a practice that had begun life as a form of human sacrifice had evolved into grim spectacles involving thousands of fighters

1 Julius Caesar turns death into mass entertainment

Of all Roman pastimes, gladiators today excite the most fascination and horror – not least because of the sneaking suspicion that, if revived, they would rapidly pick up a fervent following. Yet, ironically, this most Roman of entertainments wasn't the brainchild of the Romans. That dubious honour goes to the Etruscans, an ancient Italian people that emerged near the beginning of the first millennium BC. Gladiators used to fight in bouts to the death at Etruscan funerals – in short, they served as a form of human sacrifice.

The Romans derived many of their customs from the Etruscans. And so it was perhaps inevitable that, as they grew into the dominant force on the Italian peninsula, they would adopt gladiatorial combat with gusto. Decimus Junius Brutus, later a consul, was said to have been the first to lay on a gladiatorial show – in honour of his deceased father, in c264–262 BC. Yet, as was the case with so many aspects of ancient Roman history, the concept of fighting to the death as mass entertainment was profoundly shaped by one Julius Caesar.

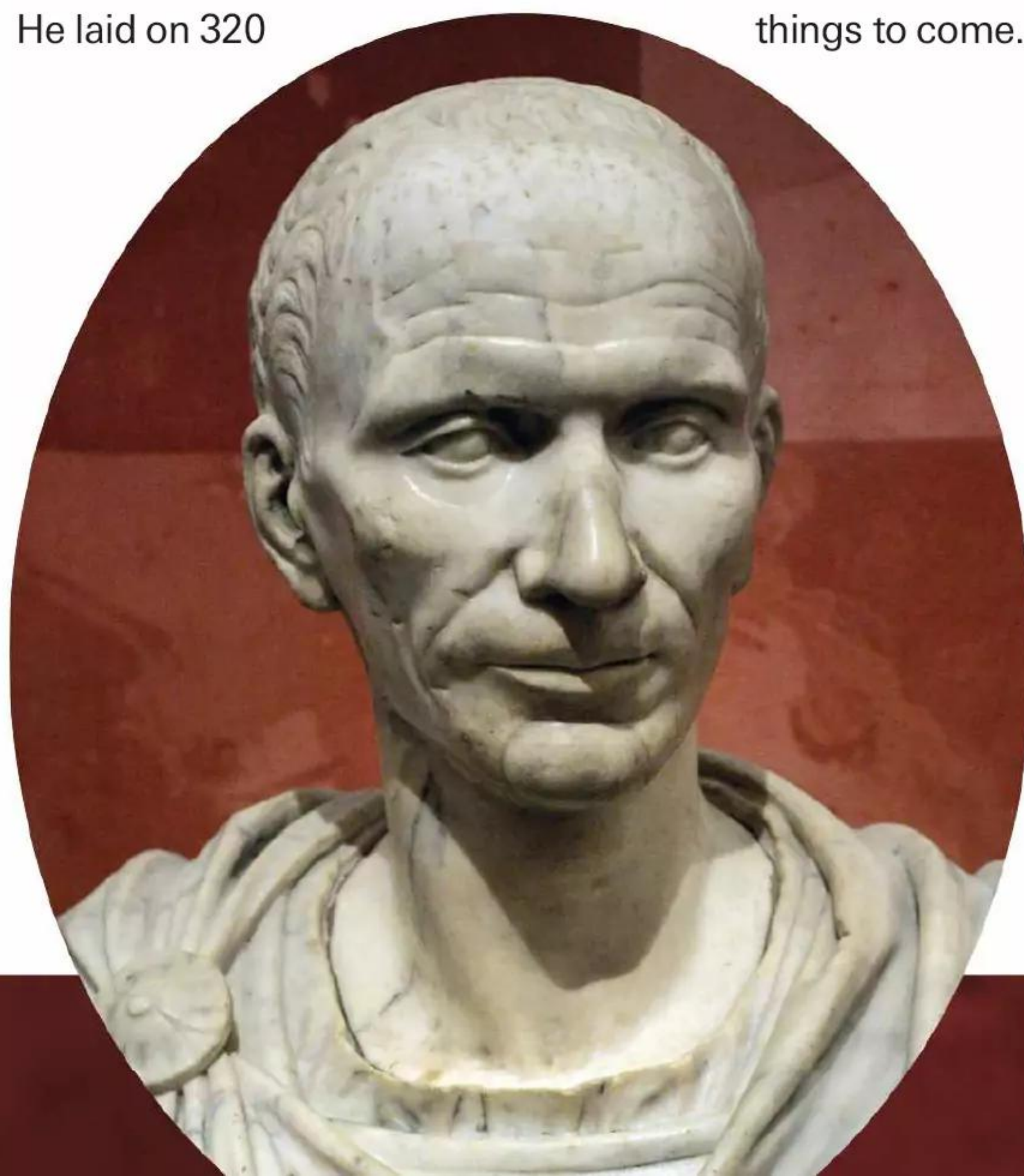
In 65 BC, Caesar used his position as *aedile* (junior magistrate) to initiate a programme of public shows to secure, in the words of the historian Suetonius, "the goodwill of the masses". He laid on 320

gladiatorial bouts and animal fights – and did so both in his name and in association with the other *aedile*, Marcus Bibulus, but in a way that ensured it was widely assumed the occasions were all his work. That, of course, was precisely his intention.

Curiously, the 320 gladiatorial bouts represented a reduction of Caesar's intentions. He had organised such a large number that his political opponents in the senate were terrified by the thought of so many armed men in Rome on Caesar's payroll. And so they passed a law putting a cap on the numbers.

The fears were well-grounded. Gladiators supplied muscle for thug politicians in the late Republic. By the 50s BC, when Roman politics was becoming increasingly polarised during the age of the imperators Caesar, Pompey and Crassus, violence was routinely used to further political agendas. In 57 BC, the notorious senator Publius Clodius Pulcher rounded up a gang of gladiators to rush those assembled to vote on a measure. They attacked and killed some of the crowd.

In Rome, gladiatorial events later became the preserve of the emperors. The first, Augustus (Caesar's heir and great-nephew), set the trend with multiple gladiatorial events, involving around 10,000 combatants. It was a sign of things to come.



Julius Caesar played on the public's love of gladiatorial combat to advance his political career

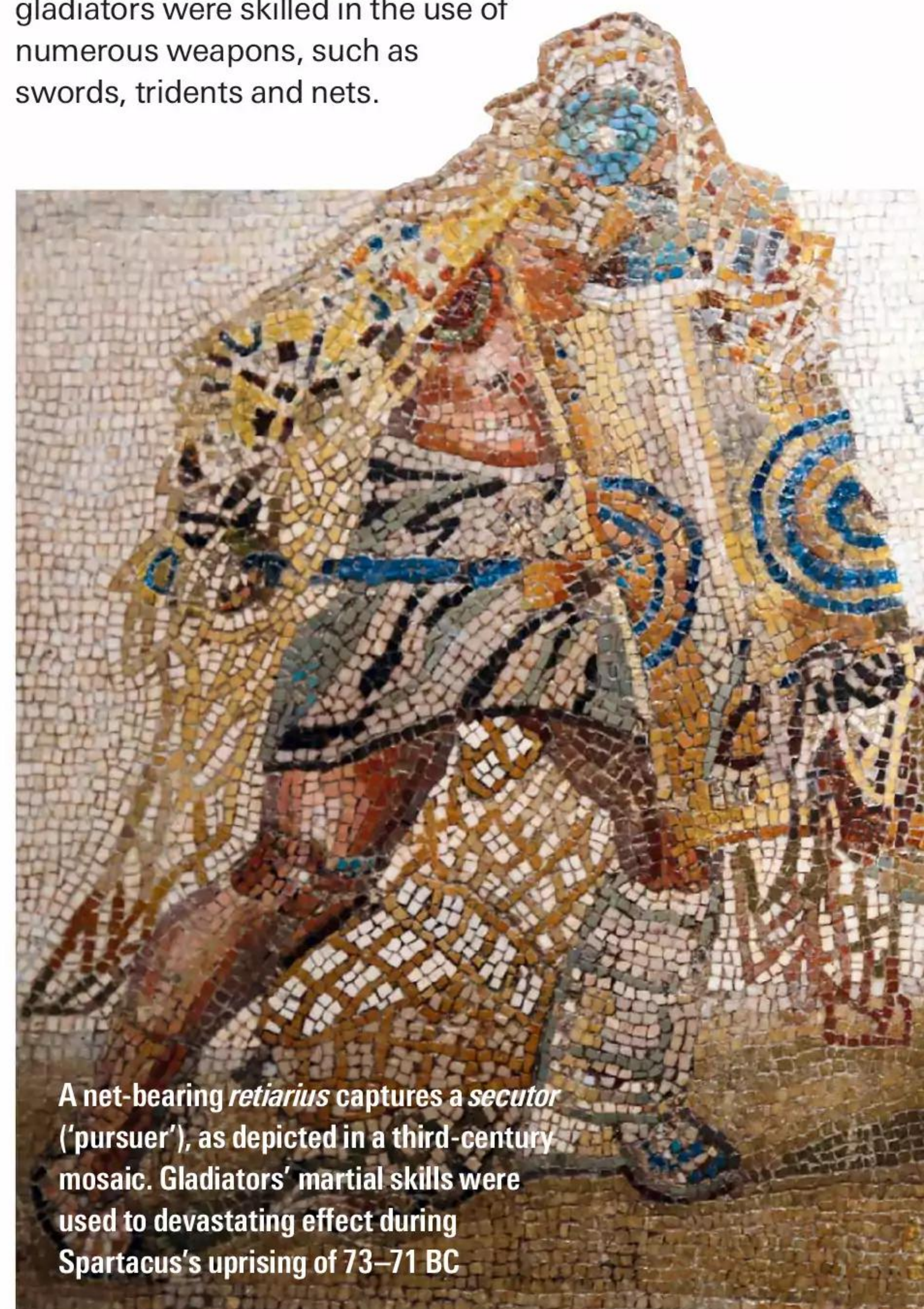
2 Spartacus gives his captors the fright of their lives

As bizarre as it may appear today, some gladiators were drawn to the profession by the violent glamour, and actually volunteered to lay their lives on the line. The vast majority, however, were there under duress, drawn mainly from the ranks of criminals and prisoners-of-war. That's not to say that they were thrown into the arena without a second's preparation. Gladiators often spent long hours honing their martial expertise.

Top-notch training may have made for better entertainment but, for the Roman authorities, it involved a huge element of risk. The most famous of all slave revolts was, of course, led by Spartacus, a former soldier in the Roman army who had been enslaved and sold for gladiatorial training at a school in Capua.

That training, allied with their leader's natural intelligence, made Spartacus's army of professional gladiators a formidable fighting force. It took two years (73–71 BC) and two armies to crush the rebellion, followed by the crucifixion of the rebels along the Appian Way (the road from Rome to Brundisium, now Brindisi).

Part of the reason that Spartacus's army proved such an effective fighting force was that gladiators were skilled in the use of numerous weapons, such as swords, tridents and nets.



A net-bearing *retiarius* captures a *secutor* ('pursuer'), as depicted in a third-century mosaic. Gladiators' martial skills were used to devastating effect during Spartacus's uprising of 73–71 BC

GETTY IMAGES

They were also taught to employ a range of defensive equipment, including helmets, shields and guards.

There were many different types of gladiator who fought in the arena. One was the *retiarius* (from *rete* = 'net'), who had no helmet and darted about the arena equipped with a net, dagger and trident. The *murillo*, armed with a sword and small shield, was named after the Greek saltwater fish *mormylos* because of the long, high crest on his helmet. The *secutor* ('pursuer') had a plain helmet with two eyeholes and no crest, protecting him from being snagged by the net of a *retiarius*, and was armed with a sword and large shield.

Gladiator specialisation was based on physical attributes. The most heavily armed had to be strong, while the *retiarii* needed to be agile and swift. Ethnicity was probably also a factor, because part of the entertainment was role-playing. Gladiatorial bouts were as much about theatrics as violence.

That brew of brutality and performance could earn gladiators fame – and the admiration of the opposite sex. "Celadus the Thracian, the gasp of all the girls!" shrieked one piece of graffiti from Pompeii. "Crescens is the lord of the dolly birds!" boasted another.

Not only could gladiators win hearts, they could also win their freedom. Some even went on to run their own gladiatorial schools, picking slaves and prisoners for their physique, educating them in the art of combat, and renting them out for shows. As the case of Spartacus proves, it was that education that made gladiators so potentially dangerous.

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A fresco from Pompeii depicts a riot in the town's amphitheatre. Gladiator bouts were banned for 10 years following the unrest

3 Mob violence rages through Pompeii

In the early decades AD, Emperor Tiberius had to send in two cohorts of soldiers to place Pollentia (now Pollenzo) in northern Italy under martial law. Just for good measure, his troops imprisoned many people, including the town councillors.

The reason for these extreme measures was a gladiator show – or lack of it. The people of Pollentia wanted a prominent centurion to stump up the funds to put on a show at the arena. He failed to oblige so the mob killed him and then refused to give up his body until, reported Suetonius, "Their violence had extorted money from his heirs for a gladiatorial show."

Things got even worse in Pompeii later in the first century AD. The town was home to one of the Roman world's oldest stone amphitheatres, built around 80–70 BC. Generations of Pompeian magistrates had lined up to compete with one another as impresarios, ingratiating themselves with the population by putting on gladiatorial combat.

All that came to an ugly end in

AD 59. The problems started when a troublemaker called Livineius Regulus – who had been expelled from the senate – decided to put on a gladiatorial show at Pompeii. Supporters from the town gathered at the arena and so did rival supporters from neighbouring Nuceria.

They started hurling insults at each other in a way the Roman historian Tacitus described as being "typical of the petulance of country towns". Unfortunately, the supporters started throwing stones at each other, and then blades were pulled. There being more Pompeians than Nucerians, the Pompeians soon overwhelmed their enemies. "As a result," said Tacitus, "many of the Nucerians were carried maimed and wounded to the capital, while a large number mourned the deaths of children or of parents."

Pompeii was severely punished for the outrage. Gladiatorial bouts were banned there for 10 years. As for the troublesome Livineius and his cronies, they were all sent into exile.



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4 Nero delights the public by forcing his senators to fight

One of the problems with gladiatorial bouts was that there were only so many ways the Romans could be treated to the sight of human beings hacking each other to death. Boredom was inevitable.

During Nero's reign (AD 54–68), the blood and gore had descended into repetitive tedium. Weary audiences watched the brutality barely half-awake. Impresarios trotted out the same old shows. Part of the problem was trying to please fussy audiences. Petronius, Nero's style guru, had one character in his *Satyricon* novel moaning about a lousy show in which only old and worn-out gladiators "who would have fallen over flat if you'd breathed on them" were sent out to battle. So bad were they that they were all flogged at the end to punish them for a

lack of enthusiasm to fight.

Nero's tutor, the Stoic philosopher Seneca, wrote a letter to a friend recounting how disappointed he'd been by a midday event: "I happened to stop off at a lunchtime show, hoping to enjoy myself with some wit and relaxation, where a man's eyes can rest at the sight of the death of their fellow men." Yet it was just the opposite, he lamented. "The fights that used to take place were merciful by comparison. Now any mucking about is set aside and this is just plain murder. The fighters wear no armour, and their entire bodies are exposed to blows – and none of these are wasted."

So how could Nero liven up the action? According to Suetonius, one solution was to force "400 senators and 600 equestrians, some of who were affluent and of excellent repute, to compete in the arena. Even those who battled with wild animals and carried out the various service duties were senators and equestrians." That was one of the reasons many in the Roman crowd loved Nero. He had the common touch. Humiliating the aristocracy was perfect entertainment.

Nero wasn't the only emperor to employ a little creativity when it came to putting on gladiator shows.

Domitian (reigned AD 81–96) introduced an extra frisson



Nero's attempts to reinvigorate a jaded format were novel – and wildly popular

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A relief from c40 BC shows men battling animals. As the quest for spectacle grew ever more grotesque, 11,000 animals died in one season staged by the emperor Trajan in AD 107

with bouts between female gladiators, known as Amazons, while in AD 107 Trajan organised 123 days of games. Eleven thousand animals died this time, and 10,000 gladiators fought one another. Excess was becoming an end in itself.

Around 80 years later, the Roman mob was treated to a new type of spectacle: a gladiator-emperor. Commodus, whom you might remember was the emperor in the movie *Gladiator*, was in love with the glamour of the arena. He acquired special chariot horses and dressed as a charioteer (as well as living with gladiators). According to the historian Cassius Dio, who witnessed Commodus's antics, "He would enter the arena in the garb of Mercury, and casting aside all his other garments, would begin his exhibition wearing only a tunic and unshod." Another historian of the time called Herodian said: "It was easy for him to defeat his opponents in gladiatorial bouts, just by wounding them, because they regarded him as emperor instead of a gladiator, and allowed him to win."

5 Britannia catches the bug for bloodsports

Gladiatorial bouts may have begun life as a niche activity at Etruscan funerals, yet, over the following centuries, they were to follow the Romans to all corners of their mighty empire – and that includes to the north-western outpost of Britannia. We know this because the physical remains of amphitheatres have been found in places such as London, Silchester, Cirencester, Dorchester and Caerleon.

The famous Colchester vase depicts two gladiators, Memnon and Valentinus, in action. They were probably notable local gladiators in their day (the late second century). Meanwhile, the Roman villa at Rudston in Yorkshire had a mosaic featuring scenes from the arena, and gladiators are depicted on another at Bignor in Sussex.

For the most part, Romano-British amphitheatres were built by creating turf embankments and digging out the arena. At Cirencester the amphitheatre was formed by digging out and adapting a quarry on the south-west side of the town (by the early second century). Stone walls were used to create revetments, entrance passageways and the arena wall. Despite natural erosion, the earthen embankments still rise to a height of about 8 metres.

At Dorchester the amphitheatre was built by adapting a Neolithic henge monument that conveniently supplied ready-made earth embankments around



The Colchester Vase shows a *retarius* raising a forefinger in submission to a *secutor*. The inscription on it reads: "Memnon Valentinus of Legion XXX"

an arena-shaped and sized enclosure. London's amphitheatre lay close to the fort of the governor's garrison, and is open to the public today.

At the VI legion's fortress and military colony at York a man called Victor was buried with a small bone label laid on his chest. It said: "Lord Victor, may you have a lucky win!", an exhortation normally applied either to gladiators or charioteers.

The glory of the remains of the II legion Augusta's base at Caerleon in south Wales is its amphitheatre. Today visitors can wander around the arena where gladiators fought and among the stone-revetted earthen embankments for the wooden seats that have long since rotted away. It had seats for around 5,000 or 6,000 spectators – enough for the entire legion – and probably doubled up as a venue for speeches to the troops and formal military displays.



The remains of Caerleon's amphitheatre which, in its heyday, had seats for around 5,000 or 6,000 spectators



Galen treats a stricken gladiator in the city of Pergamon, as depicted in an illustration from the 19th century. Not everyone was as gifted as the celebrated Greek medic

6 A doctor embarks on an eye-catching change of career

Gladiators needed some looking after, despite the fact that they might end their lives mutilated and bloody on the arena floor. One man employed to offer medical care to fighters was Gaius Futius Philargyrus, a freedman doctor of Rome's gladiators in the first century AD. (His name was appropriately descriptive. It means 'lover of the horse-training circuit', but was probably used here in a more general sense to refer to a training arena.) We also know that the Greek doctor Claudius Galen's first professional appointment was as a surgeon to gladiators.

Of course, often there was nothing a doctor could do to save gladiators from the injuries they sustained in the arena – a fact that is made grimly apparent by the contents of a cemetery at Ephesus in modern-day Turkey. Here, the graves were accompanied by inscriptions and tombstones that name and depict the dead as gladiators. The skeletons featured major

bone injuries, some even demonstrably from blows made by a trident.

Another Roman-period cemetery – this time in Driffeld Terrace in York – contains 80 or so skeletons, many of which may have been gladiators. Crucially, about 75 were adult men, which of course couldn't possibly be representative of the population. A little taller than average and well-built, many of them bore the signs of injuries, some healed and some unhealed.

It's possible that before they were buried, some of the corpses were studied by doctors in post-mortems that could also be used for anatomical lessons. The scientific writer Celsus thought gladiators provided useful evidence for anatomists. "Occasionally," he wrote, "a gladiator in the arena, a soldier in battle, or a traveller attacked by highwaymen, is wounded so that some part of his insides is exposed."

Interestingly, we know of at least one man whose life straddled the worlds of both

medicine and fighting, earning a living as an eye doctor before, following a dramatic change of career, entering the arena as a gladiator. Unfortunately, it seems that this anonymous individual wasn't a very good doctor – and that made him the target of one of the Roman poet Martial's jokes.

"You are now a *hoplomachus* [a type of gladiator]," quipped Martial. "Before you were an *opthalmicus* [an eye doctor]. You did as a doctor what you now do as a gladiator." In other words, the offending individual's career had consisted of poking out people's eyes. **H**

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Guy de la Bédoyère is a historian and broadcaster. His books include *Populus: Living and Dying in the Wealth, Smoke and Din of Ancient Rome* (Abacus, 2024)



Gladiator II, sequel to Ridley Scott's multiple Academy Award-winning *Gladiator*, is due to be released on 15 November

OUR DOCTORS SAVE LIVES. SO CAN YOUR WILL.

The lives we save
start with the gifts
you leave



DR RACHAEL CRAVEN
MSF ANAESTHETIST

“When you are working as a doctor in a conflict zone, one of the things you learn is how to manage a mass casualty

incident. This is when a large number of severely wounded people who have been caught up in an explosion, a shooting or a bomb blast all arrive at your hospital within a short period of time. When I was working at MSF’s hospital in the Yemeni city of Aden, we had to treat upwards of 50 people in the aftermath of one explosion.

In a situation like that, you can’t just rush into the single operating theatre with the first wounded people who arrive – you need to triage the injured first to decide who most needs surgery.

If I was working in the UK, ambulance crews would carry out pre-hospital triage and I would be confident that we had the resources

and capacity to conduct multiple surgeries at the same time. But in a conflict zone such as Yemen, you don’t have those resources.

The aftermath of an explosion is generally chaos. There are no ambulances, there is little communication from the scene, and the first people to arrive at hospital are often the least badly injured, as they’ve managed to walk or get a passer-by to help them.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Whether I was in Syria or Libya or Yemen, if one or two people came in with blast injuries, in the back of my mind I always expected that more were on the way and that they would probably be in worse shape.

In Yemen, we worked as a team to triage the wounded and we ensured that those who went into theatre first were the most badly injured.

Sharing that knowledge with the teams you work with is central to the way MSF operates. I was in Yemen to provide teaching in

intensive care for the junior doctors at the hospital, most of whom hadn’t been able to finish their training because of the conflict.

We focus a lot of attention on training and mentoring local staff. It’s a way for us to stand in solidarity with the people we work with and to invest in their – and their country’s – future. It’s work that will continue to save lives long after MSF has left.

I’ve seen people at their best, coming together to provide lifesaving care. Each emergency is different, but we’re always committed to delivering care to those who need it. That is our legacy, but it is not ours alone.

One in six of our lifesaving projects is funded by people leaving gifts in their wills. We can’t do what we do without you.”

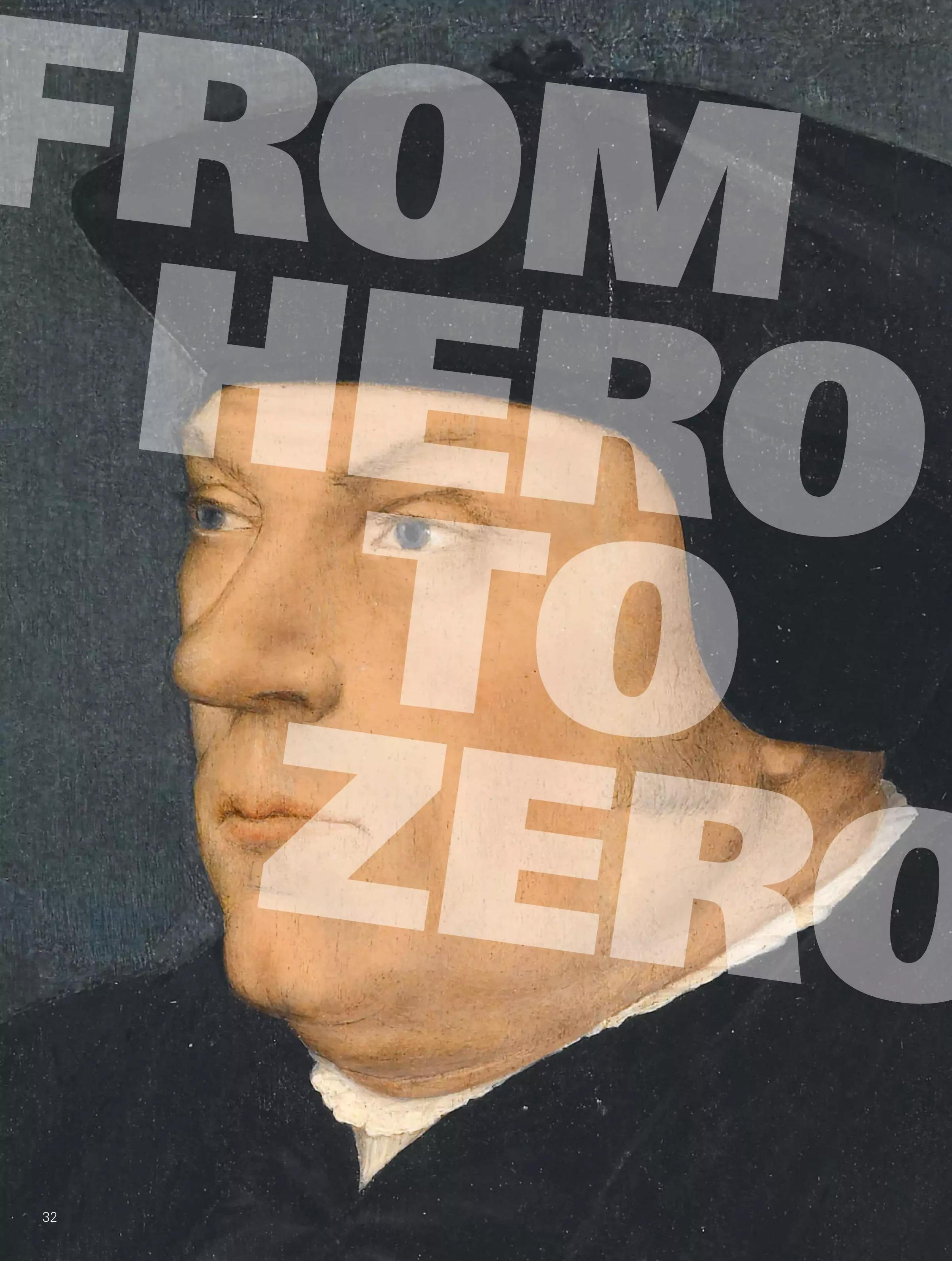
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Above: A man carries a wounded child into the MSF-run clinic at Rafah Indonesian Field Hospital in Gaza, 27 December 2023. Photograph MSF



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Thomas Cromwell's final six months were a Greek tragedy of hubris and political venom – all presided over by a tyrannical king. **Diarmaid MacCulloch** charts Cromwell's rapid descent from the very pinnacle of power to the executioner's block

As downfalls go, it was spectacular – and brutally swift. On 10 June 1540, Thomas Cromwell – Henry VIII's immensely gifted chief minister and among the most powerful men in England – arrived at court for what should have been a routine meeting of the Privy Council. As this son of Putney was soon to discover, the meeting was anything but routine.

On entering the council, Cromwell, dressed in his formal splendid attire as Knight of the Garter, was arrested and humiliated by his old enemy the Duke of Norfolk. The duke ripped the collar of St George from Cromwell's neck, while the Earl of Southampton, not to be outdone in malice, untied the garter from his knee. Cromwell was then bundled off to the Tower of London down the Thames by barge from Westminster.

He would never see the king again. Cromwell's anguished plea to Henry – "Most gracious prince: I cry for mercy, mercy, mercy!", written in desperation in his Tower cell – was met with a stony silence. On 28 July, Cromwell was led out to the scaffold on Tower Hill to face his executioner. On that very same day, the king distracted himself by marrying a new wife, Catherine Howard.

How the mighty fell

How had it come to this? How had a man who that April had reached the very pinnacle of his success by being appointed 16th Earl of Essex and Lord Great Chamberlain suffered such a vertiginous fall?

For once, the picturesque traditional story deserves priority. That story is the personal disaster of physical repulsion that destroyed the marriage of Henry VIII to his hapless wife, Anne of Cleves. The marriage had seemed such a neat idea to Cromwell – for it was *his* idea. Anne's chief virtue for Cromwell as he sought to secure the king a fourth bride was that she was not the daughter of an English nobleman, and so as queen

consort, she would not disturb the uneasy balance in English court politics between leading aristocrats.

Diplomatically, advantages stacked up. Anne's family had carried out their own Reformation in their ducal territories in western Germany, while not decisively breaking with the pope. They were also one of the counterweights to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V inside his empire.

There's another element to these negotiations that have for centuries been overshadowed by the Cleves debacle. Cromwell was actually orchestrating an international 'Two-Princess Deal', twinning the Cleves match with negotiations to marry Catherine of Aragon's daughter, the Lady Mary, to Philip Duke of Bavaria, a German prince with similar credentials to those of Cleves. Remarkably, when Anne of Cleves arrived in England, Duke Philip was already there, discreetly making the right marital overtures to Mary. He even gave her a kiss in the garden of the abbot of Westminster in front of witnesses. Nothing came from this promising start, which was caught up in the unfolding nuptial disaster that was the Cleves marriage, and Mary would have to wait another 14 years before securing the hand of a continental royal: the prince (later king) of Spain.

The symmetry of the diplomatic moves with Cleves and Bavaria made it all the more devastating when Henry departed from Cromwell's script and loathed the Lady Anne at first sight at Rochester as she journeyed up to court, on New Year's Day 1540. The reasons are locked for ever in the mystery that is Henry VIII; no one else could see much wrong with her.

Henry's efforts to find a legal way out of the marriage were all futile, and so from January 1540, he was trapped humiliatingly in Cromwell's project. That revealed the minister's vulnerability: from his first rise to power in 1532, he was always at the mercy of Henry VIII's moods and demands. Like his predecessor and patron, Cardinal Wolsey, Cromwell would be high in favour only

Complements
**Wolf Hall: The Mirror
and the Light**, which
is due to begin in
November on BBC One

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OPPOSITE PAGE: Thomas Cromwell shown in a c1533 portrait after Hans Holbein the Younger. The minister's fortunes were turned on their head in a few short weeks in 1540



Thomas Cromwell's mentor, Cardinal Wolsey. Both men fell foul of a capricious and demanding monarch

as long as he delivered a successful result for the king.

But the Cleves debacle was more than just a diplomatic failure: it also heaped personal sexual humiliation on Henry VIII. From the first night that the ill-starred couple had shared a marital bed, the king found himself repelled at the thought of any physical intimacy with her. Now those who hated Cromwell simply for being Cromwell could play on the king's emotional impulses, just as Cromwell himself had done in sealing the downfall of Henry's second wife, Anne Boleyn, back in 1536.

Cromwell had never been close to Boleyn, despite their common interest in religious Reformation. More important to their relationship was her central role in destroying his beloved master, Wolsey, whose memory Cromwell had ostentatiously commemorated in his heraldry even while Anne consolidated her position as Henry VIII's bride. Anne's execution in May 1536 brought Cromwell his first public honours that summer, which she had probably blocked previously: not just a knighthood but a peerage, Baron Cromwell of Wimbledon. He also acquired the very senior legal office of Lord Privy Seal: third-ranking office of state after the Lord Chancellor and Lord Treasurer, with control over a crucial stage in the production of documents for sealing after the initial royal signature on any grant or decision. Those promotions were galling for the existing nobility, led by the biggest snob in Tudor England, the Duke of Norfolk (whose peerage titles were all of six decades older than Cromwell's new title).

In the crisis of autumn 1536, during the northern risings known as the Pilgrimage of Grace for the Commonwealth, this nearly brought ruin to the upstart. The pilgrims saw Thomas Cromwell as their chief enemy, and in their fury at the destruction of northern monasteries (which they blamed on him), they were not intimidated by the royal armies sent against them under Norfolk's generalship.

A brush with destruction

There was a terrifying moment for Cromwell in the first week of November 1536, during which the king hesitated, pondering whether to sacrifice his minister as the centrepiece of sweeping concessions to the rebels. Henry changed his mind after retreating to his then rarely used Palace of Richmond, which happened to be significantly near a newly acquired Surrey country house of Cromwell's at Mortlake. That vital element of face-to-face contact, which Cromwell's enemies succeeded in preventing when he did eventually fall from power, brought Henry second thoughts.



Marital woes The debacle of Henry VIII's marriage to Anne of Cleves (depicted in a portrait by Hans Holbein the Younger) heaped sexual humiliation on the king – and it was Thomas Cromwell who took the blame

Instead of being destroyed by the king, Cromwell now enjoyed his increasing favour.

Indeed, in summer 1537, Baron Cromwell celebrated a spectacular dynastic triumph. His teenage son, Gregory – much-loved, charming but otherwise not exceptionally talented – married Elizabeth Seymour, slightly older than him and already widow of a Yorkshire knight. More importantly, she was the sister of Henry VIII's current queen, Jane.

The genealogical results of this wedding were intriguing: in an informal sense, they made Thomas Cromwell the king's uncle by marriage, and in a specifically formal sense, Gregory Cromwell became uncle by marriage to the heir to the throne who was born that autumn, Prince Edward. It was a formidable alliance: newly ennobled Seymours and a potential new English noble dynasty of Cromwells. That marked the Lord Privy Seal as a future danger to everyone else vying for power under the king, particularly those who felt that the greater antiquity of their noble titles was a sign that God singled them out for rule under Henry VIII.

Parallel to that dynastic complication was the polarising effect of religion. With Anne Boleyn removed, Cromwell was the chief promoter of evangelical reformation amid

the uncertain theological future of Henry VIII's newly created Church of England. His quasi-religious office as 'Vice-Gerent in Spirituals' replicated the power that Cardinal Wolsey had enjoyed, but was now exercised under the king's authority, not that of the pope.

By 1538 it would be obvious to the politically well-informed that the Vice-Gerent was not always following initiatives from King Henry, but instead using the ill-defined power of an ill-defined office to push his own reformist agenda in such matters as enforcing circulation of the Bible in English or attacking traditional cults of saints and pilgrimage to shrines.

There was much more activity of the same character behind the scenes. Cromwell was playing a dangerous game if anyone chose to draw the king's attention to what was happening – or more precisely, if the king chose to listen to that information. Henry always decided which noises rang most loudly in his ears at any one time, and during the 1530s the opposed voices had taken on a poisonous religious resonance.

Around Cromwell gathered gentry and nobility (including the Seymours) who sympathised with his reformist aims in

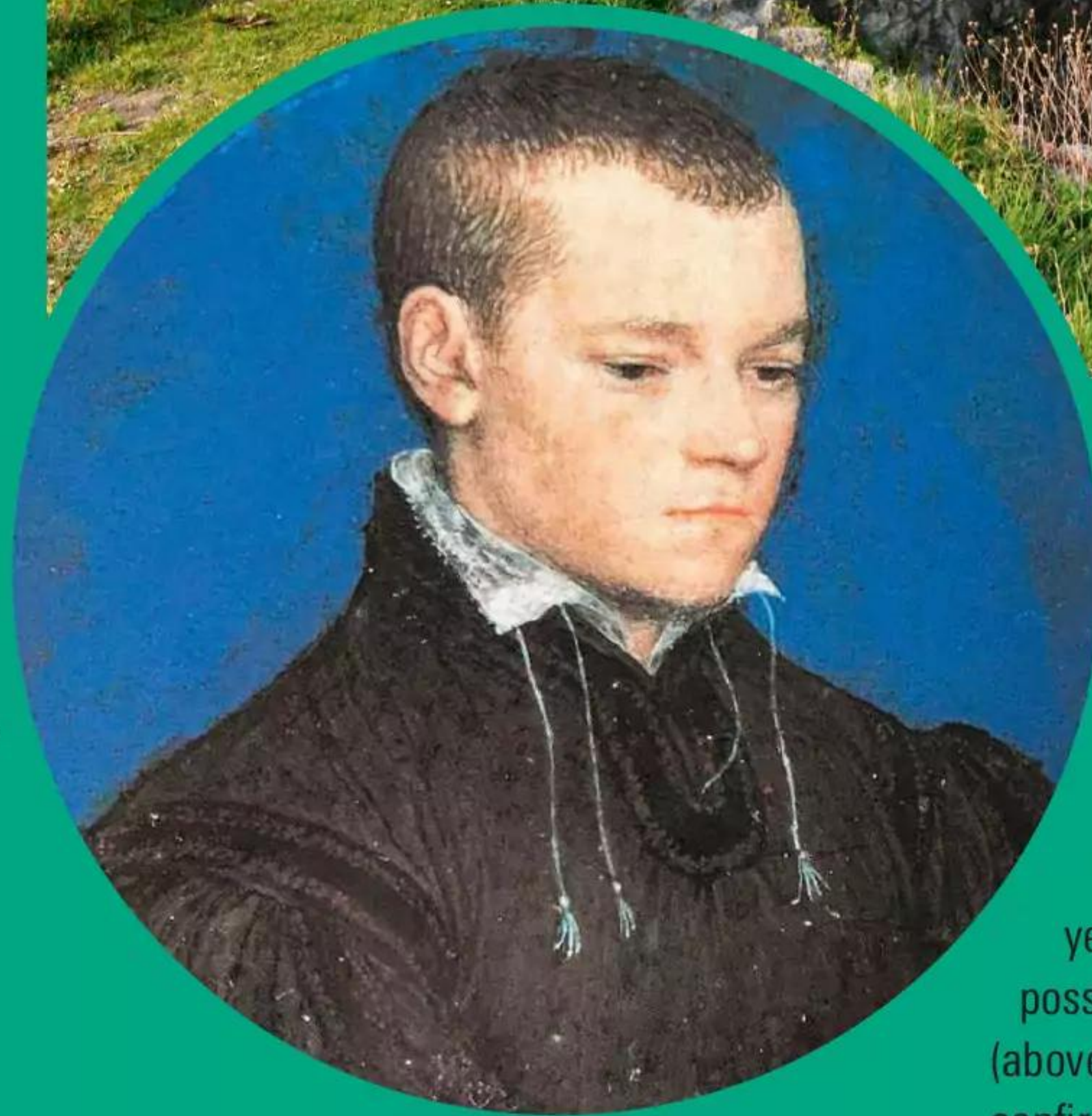
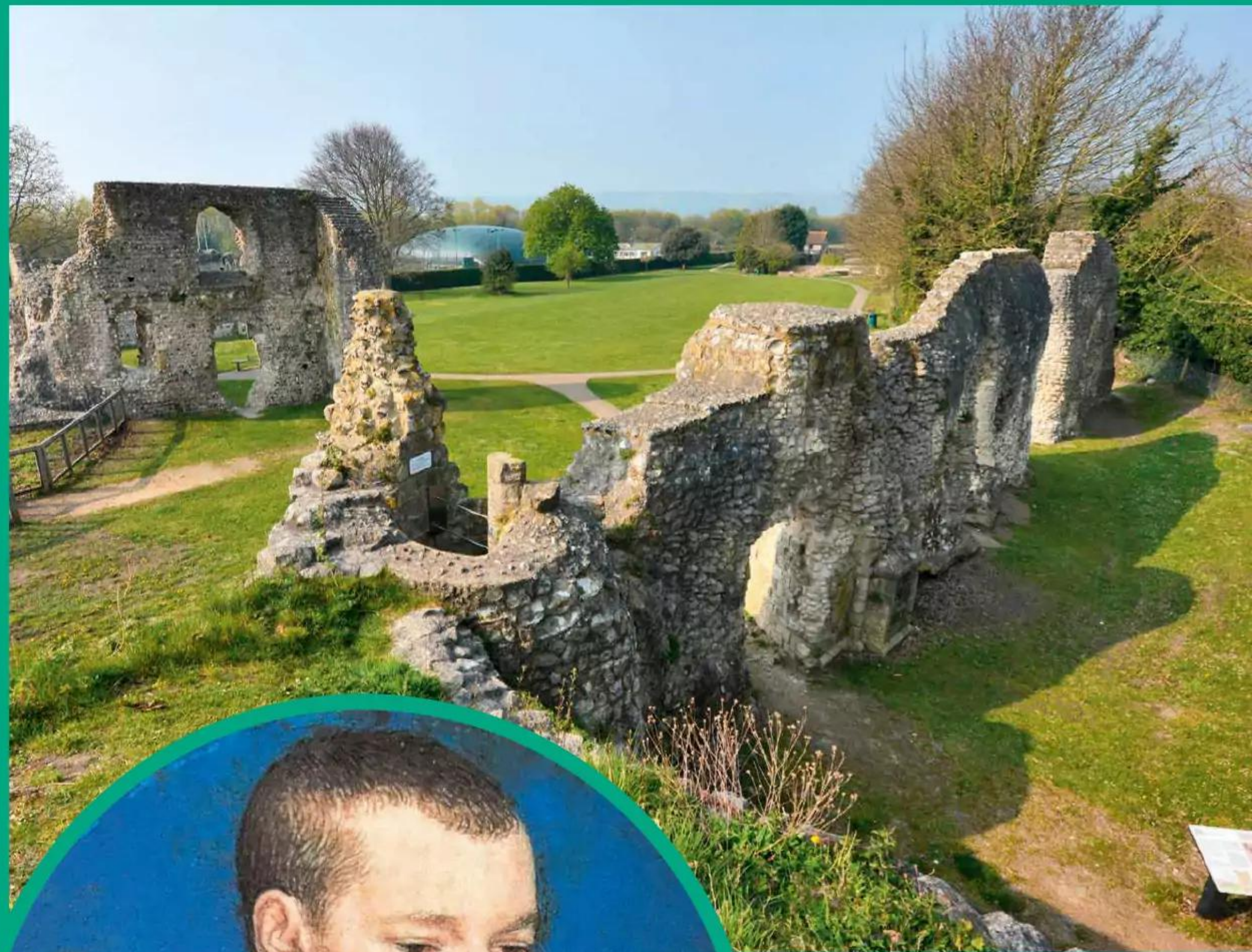


Arch enemy A c1539 portrait of Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk. "The biggest snob in England" revelled in Thomas Cromwell's fall from grace



Thomas Cromwell's Italian connections

Discover how Cromwell's continental links supercharged his rise to power in England: historyextra.com/cromwell-culture

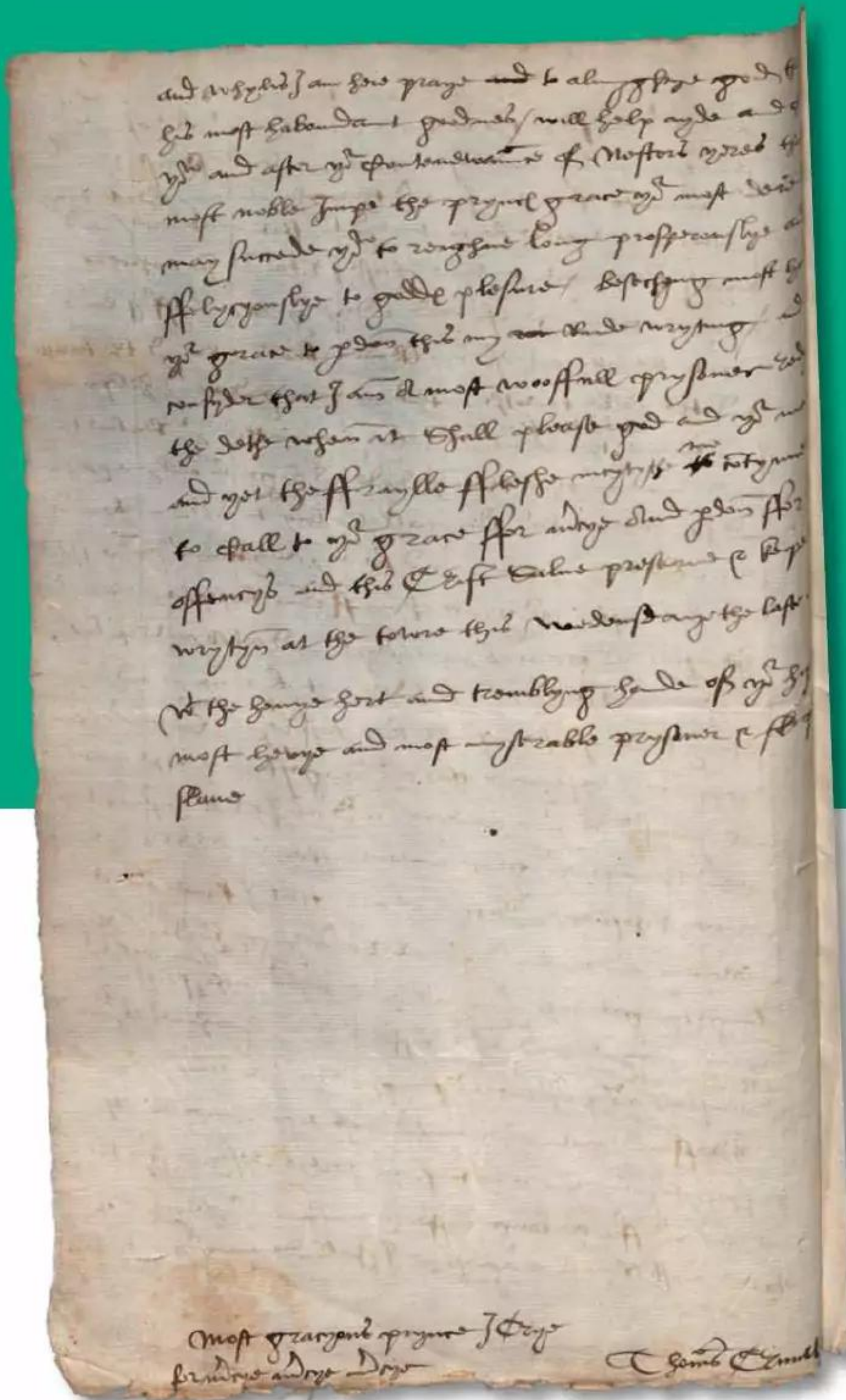


Begging to live

The letter that Thomas Cromwell wrote to Henry VIII from the Tower of London begging for "mercy! mercy! mercy!" His plea fell on deaf ears

Blind love

This Holbein miniature, long without an identification, can now be said to depict Gregory Cromwell in 1537. That same year, Thomas secured his son possession of Lewes Priory (above), a move that seems to confirm his ailing judgment



Thomas Cromwell's love for his son pushed him into ever more reckless confrontations with more established politicians

religion, in contact with Reformations in mainland Europe. Ranged against them was a wide spectrum of those who might feel any combination of dynastic or religious hostility towards the Vice-Gerent, and who would be alert to any opportunity to discredit him.

Scandalous exploits

Thomas Cromwell's love for his only surviving child pushed him into ever more reckless confrontations with more established politicians. In late 1537, Gregory and his near-royal bride were sent to Sussex to constitute a local power for king and Cromwell on the south coast. The young couple were provided with the beginnings of a stately mansion that the Lord Privy Seal planned to convert from a major monastery in a fine spreading valley site below the hill-town of Lewes.

It needed an accelerated surrender of Lewes Priory to make this rehousing work in time for the already pregnant Elizabeth Seymour. During autumn 1537 the haste

was evidenced by a new departure in policy during the monastic dissolutions: for the first time all the Lewes monks were offered a pension if they co-operated with the surrender. Then a year after all was safely settled, in late autumn 1538 Gregory committed some scandalous exploit in Sussex, the details of which are now obscured but were probably sexual in nature. That required his hasty removal with Elizabeth and son from Sussex to a conveniently vacant royal castle at Leeds in Kent. Lewes lost its chance to be the ancestral home of a great Cromwell dynasty.

The prompt arrival of Gregory and his wife in the splendour of Leeds Castle in March 1539 was politically necessary to provide minimum propriety for one of Cromwell's riskiest moves yet. That spring, the government carefully managed new parliamentary elections for the House of Commons county by county, to balance local political forces and produce an assembly that would co-operate with the king's various plans. In Kent, however, the pairing of the leading

representatives, the two 'knights of the shire', was bizarre. One was indeed the sort of eminent knight one might expect, Sir Thomas Cheyney. The other was Gregory Cromwell: a rackety teenager who within about a month of taking up residence in Kent, now occupied a place normally reserved for most respectable county gentry.

The oddity of that choice for parliament is emphasised by the fact that at no stage in 1539–40 can Gregory be found named as a justice of the peace in Kent. Whatever had happened in Sussex probably made that seem unwise for the moment, but to make Gregory a knight of the shire was the first sign of what became increasingly apparent over the next 12 months: Cromwell was losing his grip on his previously acute sense of what was not just politically possible but also politically sensible. It is significant that the trigger for this corruption of Cromwell's judgment was dynastic: his love for the erratic, energetic boy who was his only legitimate heir.

A toxic mistake

The sheer scale of the problems facing any would-be reforming minister in Tudor England, Wales and Ireland, let alone the increasing political turmoil, would have stretched anyone's powers of management, even someone with Cromwell's exceptional talent and energy. From spring 1539, events revealed his deteriorating sense of discretion and control, and even what at first seemed a smart move, the Cleves marriage, proved the most toxic of mistakes.

Cromwell's bravura improvisations in politics and policy enraged traditionalist leaders in national politics, moving them towards the conclusion that he must be stopped. Most fatally for the minister, Thomas, Duke of Norfolk was now prepared to lead the charge.

Over the previous few years Norfolk had normally been careful to cast the appearance of bluff friendship over his relations with Cromwell, even under the considerable provocation represented by the Cromwell/Seymour marriage in 1537. Now he was pushed over the edge by a move offensive in both religious and dynastic terms: the dissolution of a Cluniac priory at Thetford in Norfolk that served as mausoleum for the Howard family and their noble predecessors as earls and dukes of Norfolk. Howard had made plans to save the mausoleum by turning the priory into a non-monastic collegiate church, as happened to a number of other monasteries (most to become cathedrals) during the monastic dissolutions.

In the end, the complete suppression of Thetford Priory in February 1540 was one of the very last to take place, postponed with



Perhaps it was inevitable that great ministers of Henry VIII would fall from grace, defeated by his impossible demands

surely deliberate delay to a few days after the duke had left England on a hastily organised embassy to France. It was a direct blow to Howard's always brittle family pride: later he and his stepmother went to the extraordinary length of moving Howard tombs and their occupants from Thetford Priory to two parish churches in Suffolk and at Lambeth.

Whatever nuances we may now find in Cromwell's supervision of monastic closures through the 1530s, his old enemy would see Thetford's dissolution without a collegiate future as yet another calculated insult to Howard honour. Hence the prominent part that the Duke of Norfolk played in the dissolution of Thomas Cromwell in spring and summer 1540: not merely the drama in the Privy Council chamber, but much quiet priming of ambassadors to spread the right narrative quickly across Europe.

The jackals gather

Perhaps it was always inevitable that great ministers of Henry VIII would fall from grace, defeated by his impossible and incessant demands. That was accentuated by the fact that early Tudor England was always disadvantaged in European politics, not nearly as powerful or important as



Loose cannon

Mark Rylance (third left) plays Thomas Cromwell (alongside Claire Foy as Anne Boleyn and Damian Lewis as Henry VIII) in the BBC's 2015 adaptation of *Wolf Hall*. Both Cromwell and Boleyn would fall foul of the king's proclivity for blaming everyone for his failings but himself

HOW CROMWELL GOT HIS REVENGE

The minister's enemies would suffer dearly for the role they played in his death

Cromwell's death did not immediately end the killing. Two days later a notorious event embodied Henry VIII's idiosyncratic notion of 'middle way'. Six priests were executed: three evangelicals burned for heresy, and three papalist Catholics hanged, drawn and quartered for treason.

The evangelical clerics **Robert Barnes, Thomas Garrad and William Jerome** were clearly identified with Cromwell, and their clashes with the conservative bishop Stephen Gardiner had sparked much political turmoil in Cromwell's last months.

What is extraordinary is how little Cromwell's friends suffered after that. From the moment that Henry was satisfied in his urgent quest **not to be married to Anne of Cleves** – through the legal pronouncement that the marriage was null because of non-consummation – his rage against Cromwell began cooling. In fact, by winter 1541 he was ranting at his councillors that "upon the pretexts of trivial faults that [Cromwell] had committed, they had laid several false accusations on him, by which [the king] been made to put to death the most faithful servant he ever had".

The king's new mood soon benefited Gregory Cromwell. As early as December 1540, Gregory was granted **a new barony in his own right**, after his wife (Jane Seymour's sister) had skilfully written to the king for mercy.

After Henry VIII's death in 1547, Cromwell's Seymour allies, such as Sir John Dudley and Henry Grey Marquess of Dorset, formed an evangelical government for **Edward VI** (pictured). In effect, the opening weeks of the new reign saw a coup of Cromwellians against Thomas Cromwell's enemies: a **reversal of the debacle of 1540**.

The new regime spearheaded a religious revolution that followed the Protestant trajectory of Cromwell's policies. It also marginalised or imprisoned some of the chief actors in his fall: Thomas Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton; Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk; Stephen Gardiner and Edmund Bonner. Cromwell's posthumous revenge was a dish inevitably but still satisfyingly served cold.



Cromwell's decision to dissolve Thetford Priory enraged Thomas Howard, and the 3rd Duke of Norfolk would soon relish the opportunity to exact retribution



Henry thought it should be.

For both Wolsey and Cromwell, the trigger for downfall was failure in foreign policy. Wolsey had found it impossible to persuade a pope intimidated by Charles V to annul the long-standing marriage of Charles's aunt Catherine of Aragon to a selfish king of England. In Cromwell's case, the problem was his understandable inability to deal with Henry VIII looking a gift horse from Cleves in the mouth. After that, with the king characteristically looking for a reason to blame someone else for his own decision, the jackals were free to gather. Any charge would do: treason or heresy.

Cromwell was lucky not to be burned at the stake for heresy in 1540, instead suffering a comparatively swift (albeit still gruesome) death by the executioner's axe. Maybe the tide was already ebbing on King Henry's malice. **H**

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Diarmaid MacCulloch is emeritus professor of the history of the church and fellow of St Cross College and Campion Hall, University of Oxford



You can watch **Wolf Hall: The Mirror and the Light** on BBC One from November. See page 80 for more details

BBC ONE

FIVE THINGS YOU (PROBABLY) DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT... Victorian Britain

Ruth Goodman, who is teaching our new HistoryExtra Academy course, shares five surprising facts about everyday life (and death) in this fast-changing era

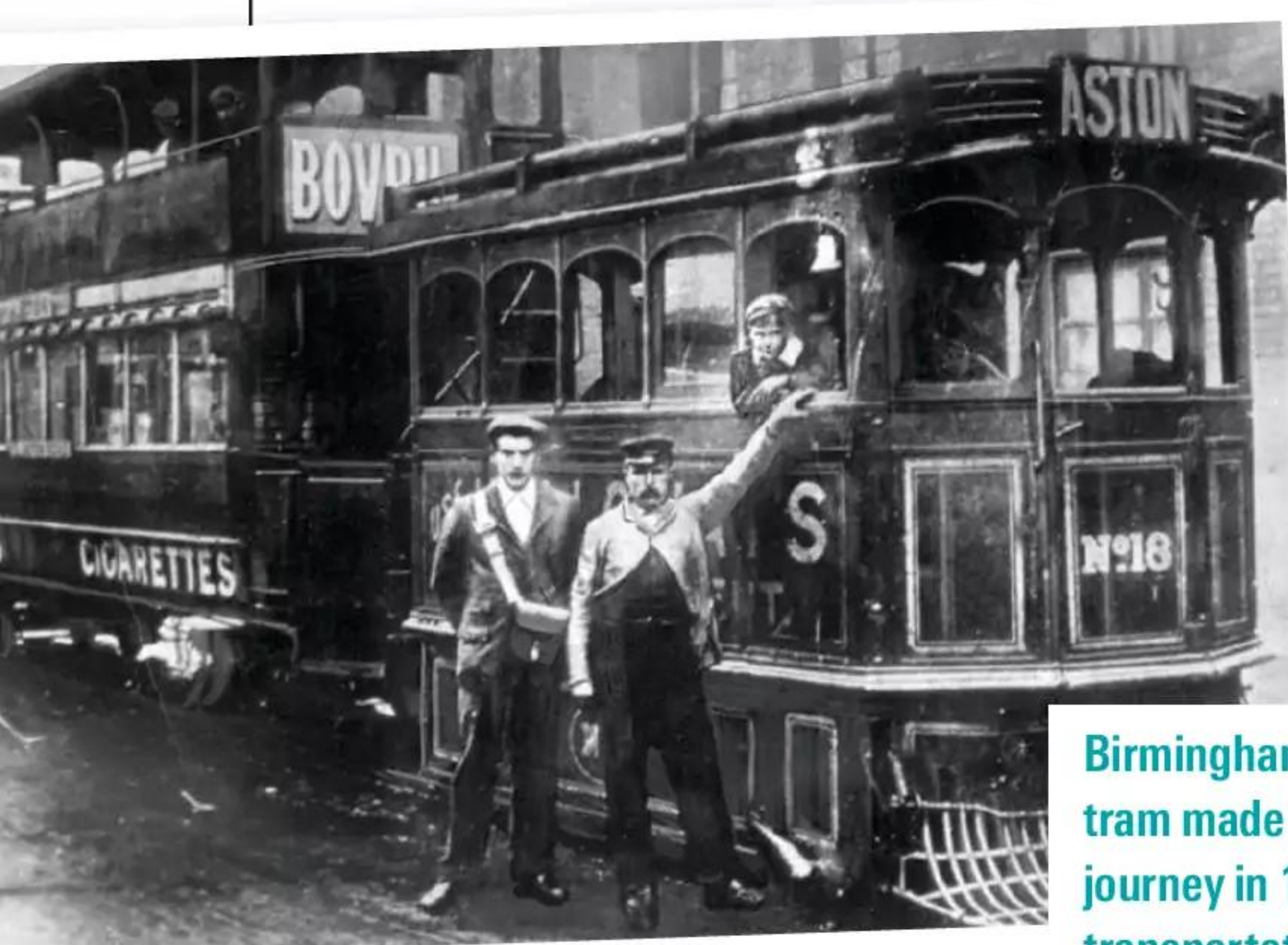
Children benefited from the drive to educate the nation, resulting in free mass education by the end of the 19th century

1 Mass transport – and holidays – proliferated

Trains, trams, buses and London's tube all revolutionised transport during Victoria's reign. People had never before been able to move around so easily, so quickly or in such huge numbers.

Admittedly, the first scheduled steam-hauled passenger service had chugged along the Liverpool and Manchester Railway in 1830, seven years before Victoria took the throne. However, the great surge of routes spreading throughout Britain, linking every part of the nation, was primarily a Victorian phenomenon.

Trams and buses also proliferated after earlier tentative starts, and the world's first underground train line – the Metropolitan Railway, running between Paddington and Farringdon – opened in London in 1863. With these new technologies came new ways of living: commuting to work from homes in the suburbs, the standardisation of time and clocks, even the idea of going on holiday. Movement became the new normal.



Birmingham's first steam tram made its maiden journey in 1882. Mass transportation flourished in the 19th century



2 Education and literacy boomed

Education was a hot topic at the start of Victoria's reign, when about half of the population of Britain had no schooling at all. The Victorians set their collective sights on improving both those basic numbers and the quality of education across the social spectrum. It would prove to be a long, hard slog, but one that shifted Britain into a new phase of development.

Diverse groups of people got in on the act, albeit in a rather piecemeal fashion, setting up schools for the blind, schools for the ragged poor, schools for nonconformist churchgoers and schools for misbehaving boys. Notably, schools for girls opened across the land. By 1860, these concerted efforts were having an effect: 70 per cent of boys and

60 per cent of girls could now read and write as they entered the world of full-time employment.

But it was only when politicians decided the state should get involved that a true step change occurred. The Elementary Education Act of 1870 introduced a framework for the provision of universal education for children aged between 5 and 12 in England and Wales, although parents still had to pay fees in most cases. Then, to make education truly universal, a further act in 1891 mandated government money being given directly to schools, and banned elementary schools from charging fees. Free mass education had arrived, and by 1901 pretty much the entire population of Britain was literate.



A poster advertising New Zealand lamb, which arrived in large quantities in Britain – one of the many food imports that became commercially viable in the 19th century

3 Britain's food supply became truly global

For centuries, sailing ships had brought luxury foodstuffs to Britain from around the world: sugar, tea and spices were desirable imports – and commensurately expensive. But the proliferation of steamships – faster and boasting vastly more space for cargo – made the importation of more basic staples commercially viable. From the 1870s, wheat from Canada and the US, beef from Argentina and lamb

from New Zealand began to arrive in vast quantities.

In Britain, food prices fell dramatically as supplies of such imported goods soared. More food fed more mouths and raised the living standards of the urban poor. It also pushed British agriculture into a steep decline, driving down the living standards of the rural poor and forcing vast numbers of people off the land.

4 Communication became fast and cheap

The start of the Victorian age coincided with a huge reduction in the cost of communication and a massive rise in its speed. In 1837, two things changed. The first commercial electrical telegraph system was demonstrated, enabling the near-instant transmission of messages, which became known as telegrams. At almost the same moment, Sir Rowland Hill was campaigning for the introduction of a system of affordable, pre-paid postage – the stamp.

The introduction of the Penny Post in 1840 saved a fortune in administration, and made sending letters much more affordable. The Post Office boomed, offering two deliveries a day in most areas and four a day in central London. It was possible in the



The telephone sped up communication after it arrived in 1878, having been patented by Alexander Graham Bell

business districts to have a full back-and-forth conversation in a single day – much like email today. Then, in 1878, the telephone arrived in Britain – Alexander Graham Bell demonstrated it to the queen herself on 14 January – and communication sped up further still.



Victorian Britain is the latest topic in our ongoing series of **online courses** at historyextra.com/academy

5 The nation's health got a major fillip

When Victoria became queen in 1837, life expectancy in Britain was about 38 years. By the end of her reign in 1901, it had risen to around 48. Though both of these numbers seem low to us now, this nonetheless represented an enormous improvement in the health of the nation.

The key to that change was an acceptance – albeit initially grudging – of germ theory, the idea that sickness is caused by tiny living creatures such as bacteria and viruses. That knowledge brought with it the realisation that such causes of disease can be killed or at least kept away from people by the use of stringent hygiene. That meant improvements in water supplies, disposal of human waste, cleanliness of food production and the hygiene of our homes and bodies.

During the Victorian era, wholesale campaigns aimed to provide the entire population with safe drinking water and efficient drains. Accompanied by fundamental leaps forward in medical science, these resulted in major health gains across the land. **H**

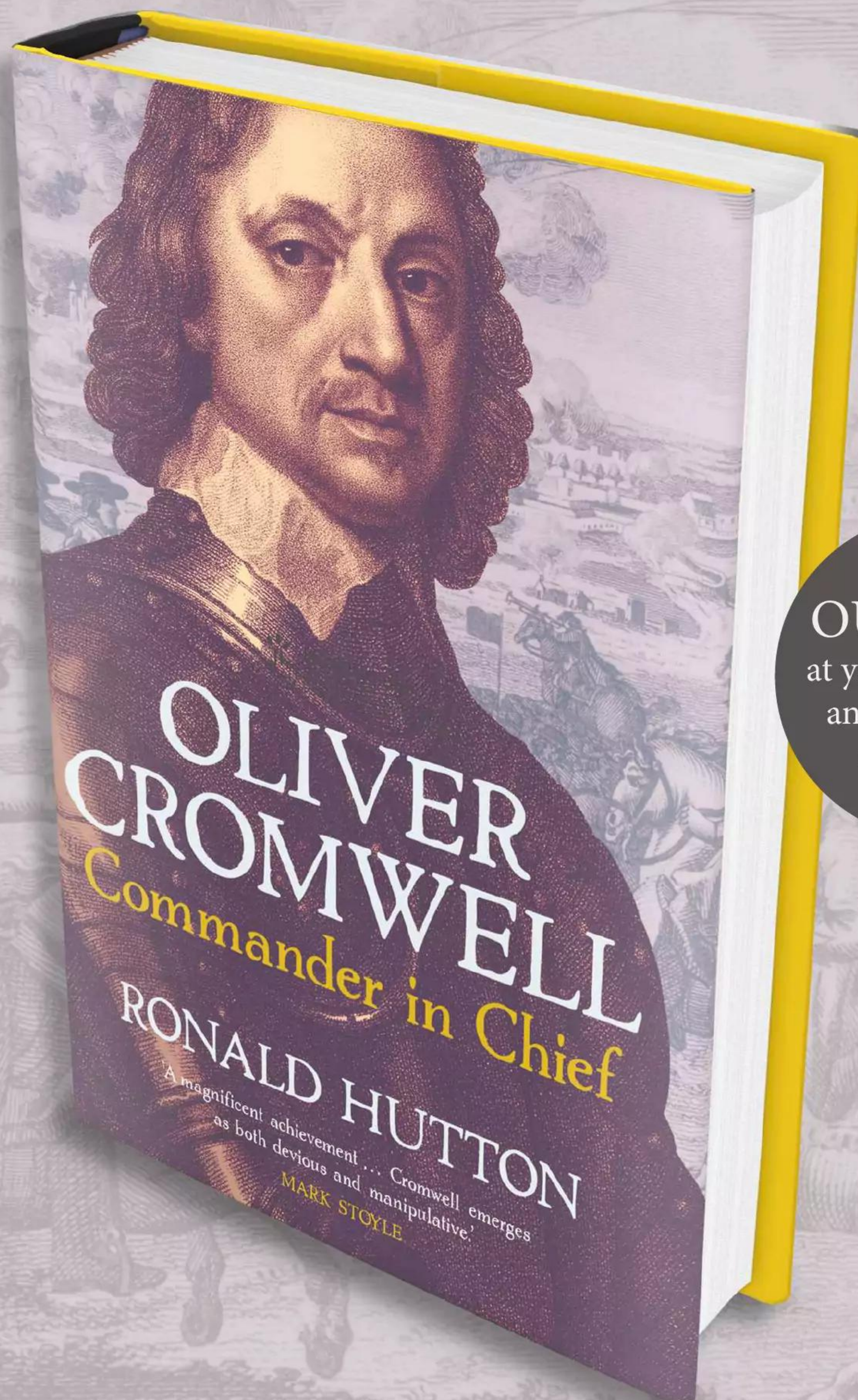


Pears soap became a household name thanks to prolific advertising and a new appetite for hygiene

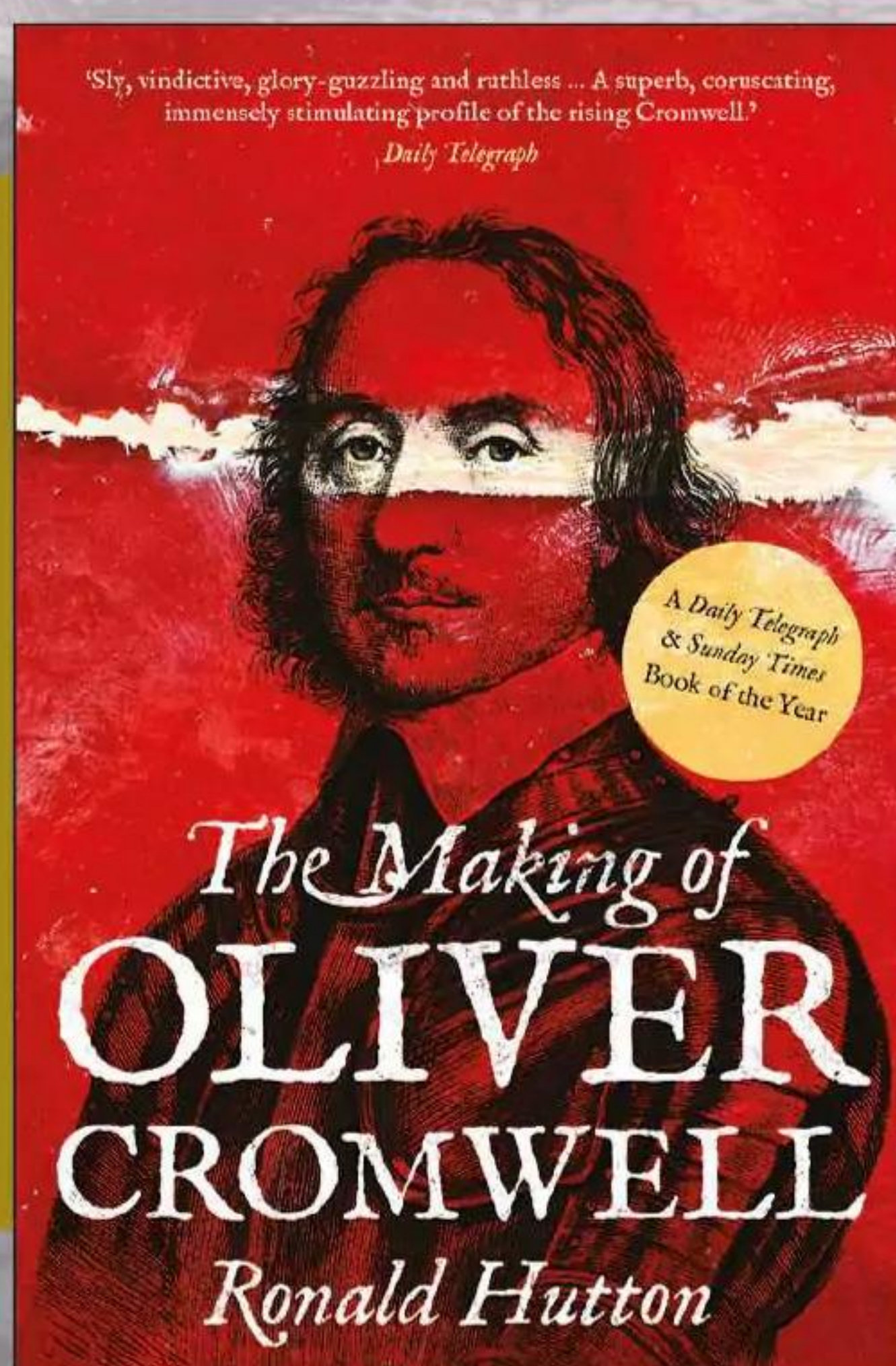
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Ruth Goodman is a social and domestic historian and broadcaster. Her books include *How to Be a Victorian* (Penguin, 2013)

‘Magnificent ... A monumental achievement’

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THE LONG ROAD TO PARADISE

On the 350th anniversary of the death of John Milton, **Islam Issa** explores the story of a poet and polemicist who lost two of his wives, his liberty and his sight – but not his hope



John Milton was an early riser. He woke each morning with poetry in his head, itching for it to be recorded. The verses came to him during the night, he said – a special delivery from his very own lyrical muse. By 1652, he had completely lost his sight, so the disgruntled Milton had to wait patiently for a scribe to arrive. In the popular imagination, one of them was his daughter, Deborah, who has been depicted putting pen to paper as her father dictates his intricate poetry. Milton's biographer wrote that on some days, when it took longer than usual for someone to begin transcribing, the poet "would complain, saying he wanted to be milked".

That was in the mid-1660s, when Milton – in an effort to evade the Great Plague of London – had relocated to a cottage in Chalfont St Giles, rural Buckinghamshire. The move to the country had worked wonders for his writing, and he set to putting the final touches on a magnum opus that had occupied his thoughts for decades and taken years to complete.

It hadn't always been his intention to compose an epic poem. In the early 1640s he'd had in mind a drama, scribbling the outline for a tragedy titled *Adam Unparadised*. But the political and social turmoil of the couple

of decades before his country sojourn had changed his mind about writing a play. Instead, he decided to compose a lengthy poem of more than 10,000 unrhymed lines. Its title was *Paradise Lost*.

Tumultuous times

John Milton was born in 1608 in the shadow of St Paul's Cathedral, London, the son of a scrivener and composer, also named John. In early adulthood he had developed a habit of opposing the status quo, especially when it came to religion and politics. The Church of England was too hierarchical, he said, proposing that regular people should be able to read the scriptures without being influenced by religious leaders. As for the Roman Catholic church, its obsession with popery and rituals was a form of heresy.

In 1642, Milton went to Oxfordshire to collect an interest payment from a landowner to whom his father had lent money years earlier. By the time he returned to London, he had tied the knot with the debtor's daughter. This marriage to Mary Powell – at 17, half his age – lasted just a few weeks. It's long been assumed that Milton must have been difficult to live with. A more obvious cause of the rift was politics: the first rumblings of civil war were growing, and the Powell family's strong royalist views were incompatible with Milton's staunch republicanism.

In any case, when Mary abandoned him and returned to her family, Milton redirected his intellectual energies to addressing the topic of divorce. The law of the time offered a separation agreement “from bed and board” that didn’t go as far as terminating the marriage. Dissolution “from the bond of marriage” was valid only on grounds of adultery. Milton’s *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, published as an anonymous and unlicensed pamphlet, made the radical argument that a breakdown due to “indisposition, unfitness, or contrariety of mind” should be sufficient grounds.

Milton was well ahead of his time. It was another three centuries before parliament passed the Divorce Reform Act 1969, legalising no-fault divorce on the grounds of an “irretrievable breakdown”. To his contemporaries, however, Milton’s justifications for divorce were likely the most controversial of all his opinions. They led to open attacks that reached parliament (by now his name was associated publicly with the book), where he was condemned and where members pushed for state control over unregistered books, including Milton’s contentious tract.

Under the Licensing Order of 1643, every book produced had to be read and approved by a censor before publication. Milton penned a strong and impassioned case opposing the policy. In *Areopagitica*, which became his most famous polemic, he defended freedom of expression and compared suppressing books to killing humans – in fact, he wrote, it might be even more deplorable, because it “slays an immortality rather than a life”.

Republican ideals

Milton was most prolific when expounding his diehard republican beliefs. During the 1640s, he spent much of his time writing poetry and prose that supported the militant anti-monarchical movement. When the republican army’s commander-in-chief, Thomas Fairfax, besieged Colchester in 1648, Milton wrote a sonnet in praise of “Fairfax, whose name in arms through Europe rings”. That poem also suggested that the job of opposing the

tyranny of inherited power remained unfinished: “O yet a nobler task awaits thy hand; / For what can war, but endless war still breed, / Till truth, and right from violence be freed.”

Early the next year, parliament indicted Charles I. Fairfax, meanwhile, was overshadowed by a subordinate commander, Oliver Cromwell, who became the island’s most influential statesman – and in whom Milton placed high hopes.

Charles I’s trial lasted eight days in January 1649. During that time,



Alternative vision

An engraving of John Milton in 1670. By that time he’d been blind for nearly two decades – but continued to express strong views on religion and the monarchy in his writing

Milton quickly put together the *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, its title page boasting “that it is lawful, and hath been held so through all ages, for any, who have the power, to call to account a tyrant, or wicked KING, and after due conviction, to depose, and put him to death”.

On 30 January, the king was decapitated by a single axe blow and his head held up, blood dripping from the neck, to the cheering crowd. The monarchy and the House of Lords were swiftly abolished. Some years later, Cromwell became head of state, taking the (unmistakably regal) title of lord protector.

Speaking in tongues

Within six weeks of Charles’s execution, Milton was called upon to serve the republican government in the role of secretary for foreign tongues. Tasked with translating official communications, largely from the period’s international language of Latin, Milton received a handsome annual salary of £288, 13 shillings and 6½d (around £45,000 today).

Foreign governments were still wary of the new regime in Britain, so Milton’s talents were mainly channelled into writings in defence of the revolution. His *Eikonoklastes* (The Image Breaker), published in October 1649, attempted to justify the regicide. It was written in response to *Eikon Basilike* (The Royal Image), subtitled *The Portraiture of His Sacred Majesty in his Solitudes and Sufferings*, published shortly after the execution and purportedly written by the king himself before he died.

Held in high regard by royalists, the title page of *Eikon Basilike* featured an allegorical image depicting Charles I as a saintly martyr, engraved by William Marshall. That artist had earlier drawn Milton for his 1645 poetry collection – a depiction that the author hated. In retribution, Milton instructed Marshall to engrave a caption in Greek, describing the latter as “a rank beginner” and “a good-for-nothing artist” – barbs which, not speaking that language, he would have been unable to understand.

Milton and Mary Powell had reconciled in 1645, but different problems soon arose. For one thing, the writer’s eyesight was weakening: by 1648, he’d lost all vision in one eye, and in 1652 he became permanently blind. In that same devastating year, Mary died from complications during the birth of their third daughter, Deborah.

Milton’s second marriage, to Katherine Woodcock in 1656, appears to have been more amicable. Like his first wife, though, Katherine died in 1658 following childbirth. In one of his most emotive pieces, Milton writes

Milton alluded to poetry and tragedy from across the continent to tell his epic tale of humanity’s fall from grace



Regicide and revolution

The frontispiece of *Eikon Basilike*, purportedly written by Charles I, depicting the deposed monarch as a saintly martyr; Milton wrote in justification of the king's execution BELOW: Milton's *Areopagitica*, his most famous polemic, defended freedom of expression – claiming that suppressing books could be compared to killing humans

about encountering his late beloved, whom he met only after losing his sight, during his vivid sleep: “But O as to embrace me she inclined, / I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night.” Perhaps tellingly, it was around this time that Milton – a blind man left to raise his three daughters alone – began to work on *Paradise Lost*.

Despite the overthrow of the monarchy, on Oliver's death in September 1658 the Cromwellian government reverted to dynastic succession. Richard Cromwell succeeded his father as lord protector, but lacked the qualities that had prompted Milton to describe his father as “chief of men... Guided by faith and matchless fortitude”.

Parliament soon retook control, much to Milton's delight. Within a few months, however, the army had dissolved parliament – something that Milton condemned in no uncertain terms. As the royalists regained power, and with the restoration of the monarchy looking inevitable, Milton remained outspoken in opposition. *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* proposed the formation of a permanent republican federation, or at the very least an elected sovereign. Yet such a scheme was, by 1660, hopelessly utopian.

Writer on the run

The monarchy was restored that May, when Charles II returned from exile and succeeded his father. Like his fellow republicans, Milton had to either run or hide. With an arrest warrant issued, and in real danger of assassination, he went into hiding. A proclamation was issued ordering that all of his books should be collected for burning, and Milton's writings were consigned to the flames at the Old Bailey. Execution loomed, and many of his friends were put to death.

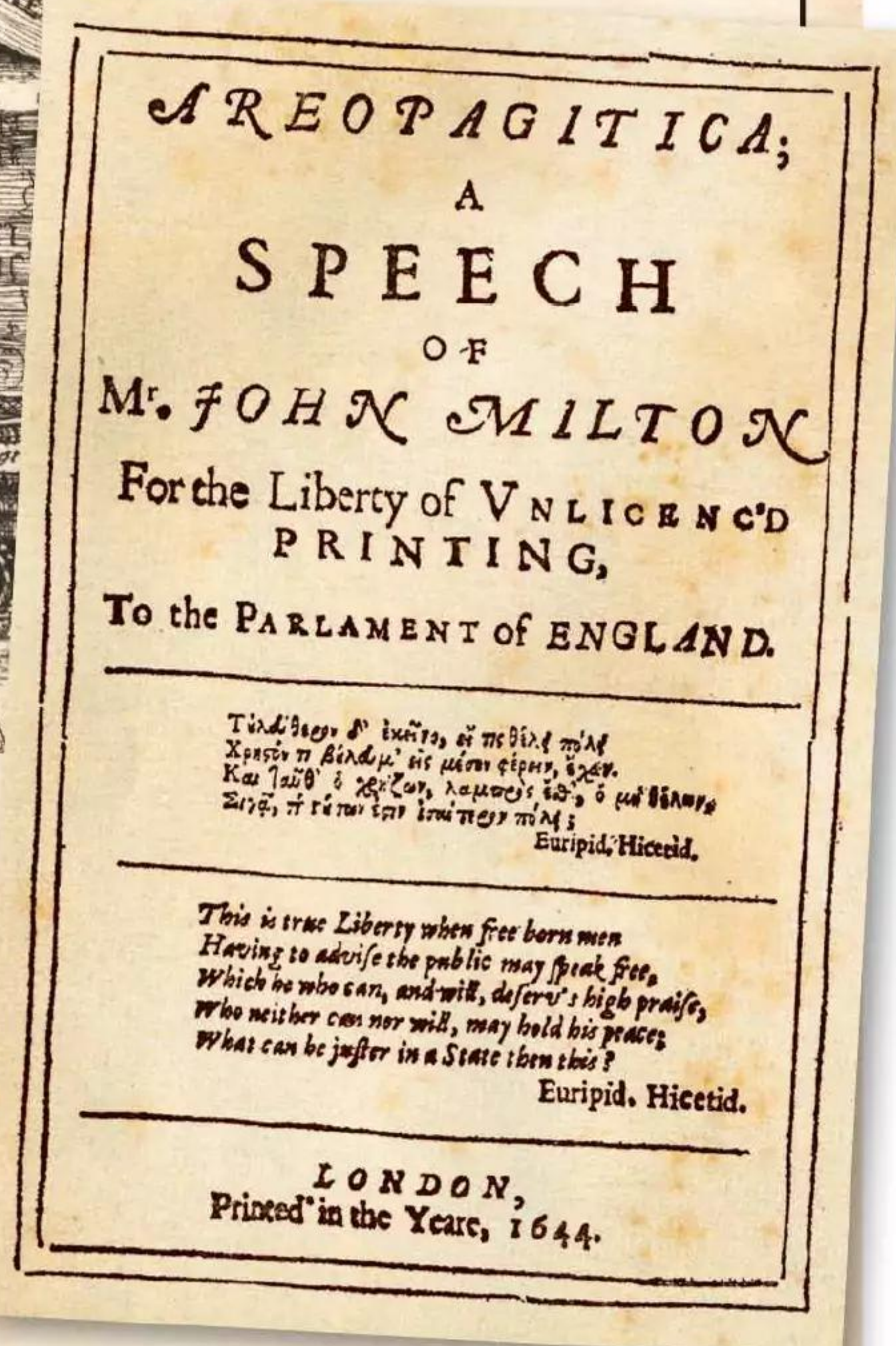
A general pardon issued later in the summer of 1660

exempted Milton from suffering the same fate, but it didn't mean that he was safe. By autumn, Milton had been arrested and imprisoned in the Tower of London. It's not known why he was pardoned, around three months later; it may have been because of his visual impairment, or thanks to support from his friend Andrew Marvell, a poet who was also an influential MP. Still, Milton emerged from prison having lost many of his acquaintances, and in financial difficulty; he'd paid £150 – a large sum – to be released, and £2,000 of his savings had been seized. More detrimentally still, his dream of a republic – one in which he had believed, that he'd promoted and that had, for a short while, lived – had all but vanished.

The Restoration complete, plague arrived to ravage England, driving Milton to take refuge in Buckinghamshire in July 1665. When that epidemic abated, he made his way back to London early the following year – only to be met by another disaster: the Great Fire. Though his house survived, the majority of his city was razed.

Milton had spent the first half of the 1660s focusing on *Paradise Lost*, with an inevitably different outlook on life. “I now must change / Those notes to tragic,” laments the poem's narrator. Milton was by then blind, lonely and essentially under house arrest, the powers he had challenged now restored: “fallen on evil days, / On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues; / In darkness, and with dangers compassed round, / And solitude.”

The well-read Milton alluded to the scriptures, poetry and tragedy from across the continent to tell his epic tale of humanity's fall from grace. The result is a dramatic,





Inspiring astronomer

A 19th-century painting of Milton visiting Galileo Galilei in Florence in 1638, when the astronomer was blind and under house arrest – echoed in the poet's later life

imaginative take on Satan's rebellion against God, and the subsequent fall of Adam and Eve. Set at the beginning of human history, it boasts an expansive setting, with Heaven at the top and Earth dangling from it, Hell at the bottom and a dark Chaos in between. Its story is one of ambition and rebellion, questioning the extent of free will and divine justice. Its characters – even God the Father and Son – are complicated and imperfect. And no Miltonic character is more famous than the deeply intense Satan, who rallies the fallen angels with populist rhetoric but also contemplates his condition with psychological rigour: “Me miserable! Which way shall I fly / Infinite wrath, and infinite despair? / Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell.”

It's difficult not to read Milton's politics into his great epic. In the preface, entitled ‘The Verse’, he explains why the poem doesn't rhyme – a fact that appears to have disconcerted his publisher. Milton decries “the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming”. Not only had royalist poets used rhyming couplets, but rhyme served as a symbol for the shackles of the ruling powers, he thought. By opposing rhyme and writing freely, Milton's style was inherently nonconformist. Even more surprising is Satan's often justified, if overambitious, opposition to the omnipotent but stubborn and out-of-touch God. It's no surprise that this has long been interpreted as a metaphor for brave opposition against the seemingly immovable monarchy.

In 1667, publisher Samuel Simmons paid Milton £5 for the rights to *Paradise Lost*; according to his contract, he received a further £5 once sales reached an agreed figure. In 1674, he republished the most authoritative version of

Paradise Lost, in 12 books – like the classic epics with which he may have felt it was on a par. A few weeks later, Milton prepared his will, in which he mentioned the money still owed by his first wife's father. He died in November that year – 350 years ago.

All is not lost

It's both intriguing and telling that Milton didn't venture to North America. As well as Puritans and Quakers, many anti-monarchists crossed the Atlantic to set up republican structures in the colonies.

Indeed, the founding fathers of the US drew on Milton's work as they shaped the fundamental republican ideals of their new nation. In an alternative universe, he might have been America's greatest poet. Yet though Milton was a radical, he was also an idealist who stayed put, believing that he could change the system.

He had seen some of the world beyond England, travelling to Italy, Geneva and France in 1638. He appears to have had no trouble mastering Italian, claiming that it's “easily learned at any odd hour”. It's even said that Milton rolled his letter R when he spoke in Europe, in an effort to differentiate himself from other embarrassing compatriots on the continent.

That trip had a formative effect on Milton, evident in *Paradise Lost*. When Satan ventures from Hell to Eden with the intention of taking down Adam and Eve, his shield, “massy, large and round... Hung on his shoulders like the moon”. Satan is essentially carrying his shield like a big backpack: it looks like the moon only if “through optic glass the Tuscan artist views” it.

That artist was the astronomer Galileo Galilei, who'd championed the idea that the Earth moves around the sun. This view was officially deemed “foolish and absurd... formally heretical since it explicitly contradicts in many places the sense of holy scripture”. By the time Milton met him, the Italian was elderly and blind. He had challenged authority but been forced to retract his beliefs, and was under house arrest – just as Milton was when writing *Paradise Lost*. No wonder Milton also challenged authority.

Never to yield

Yet there is much to suggest that a spark of idealism lived on. Adam, Eve and Satan seemingly all lose in *Paradise Lost*. But its ending sees the human couple locking hands as they step into a new world, free from Eden's baggage – a world in which they can explore themselves and engage their free will. Even Satan, “in dubious battle... shook his (God's) throne”. Here, Milton holds on to the thought that, for a short while, he played a part in shaking the establishment. “What though the field be lost?” Satan asks himself, before continuing to declare that “All is not lost; the unconquerable will... And courage never to submit or yield.”

Milton's influence on the English language is as profound as his views on politics and religion were radical. It's claimed that he invented almost three times as many words as Shakespeare did. Throughout his career, too, he conceived phrases, many of which speak to the enduring necessity of optimism. In his masque *Comus*, the character of the Lady spots a “cloud / Turn forth her silver lining”. And in the elegy *Lycidas*, Milton ends by confirming the temporary nature of grieving – that life must go on: “At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue: / Tomorrow to fresh woods and pastures new.” **H**

Islam Issa is professor of literature and history at Birmingham City University. His latest book is *Alexandria: The City that Changed the World* (Hodder and Stoughton, 2023)



Find out more about **Milton's great epic** in an episode of BBC Radio 4's *Free Thinking*, featuring Islam Issa – listen at bbc.co.uk/programmes/p05215d9



The founding fathers of the US drew on Milton's work as they shaped their fundamental republican ideals

MILTON'S ARTISTIC LEGACY

Over the three and a half centuries since its creator's death, *Paradise Lost* has inspired generations of painters, musicians and writers

PAINTING & POETRY

The devil's party

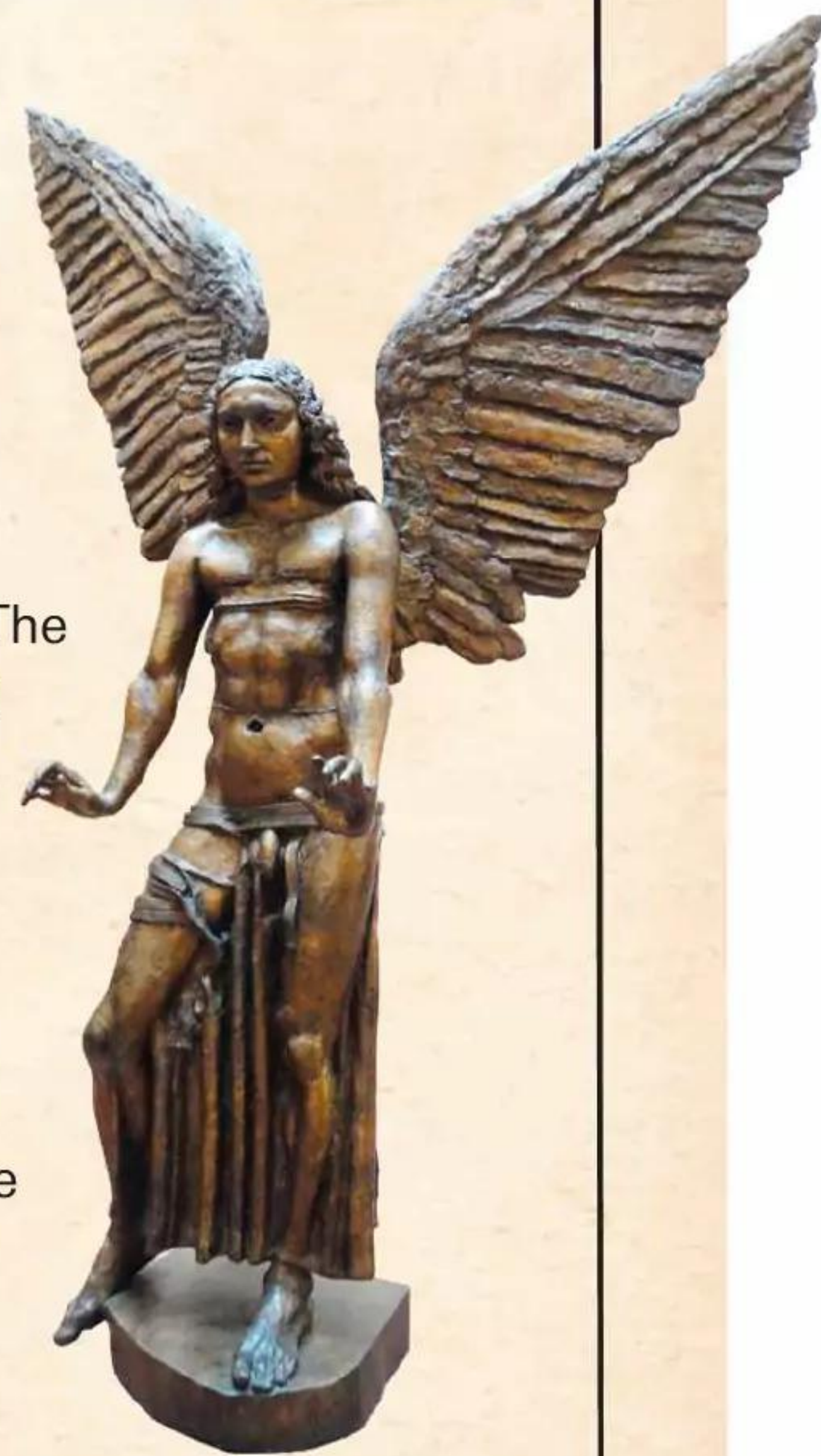
Poet and painter William Blake quipped that Milton was "of the Devil's party without knowing it". The protagonist of Blake's illustrated *Milton: A Poem* is that author, whose soul is re-embodied from Heaven. Describing blindness, the narrator of *Paradise Lost* mentions that a "cloud" of "ever-during dark Surrounds me"; in the first picture of his illustrated epic, Blake drew a naked Milton surrounded by darkness and clouds. In the 1800s, Blake also created a series of striking watercolour plates illustrating *Paradise Lost* (including the image above, of Satan).



SCULPTURE

O how fallen!

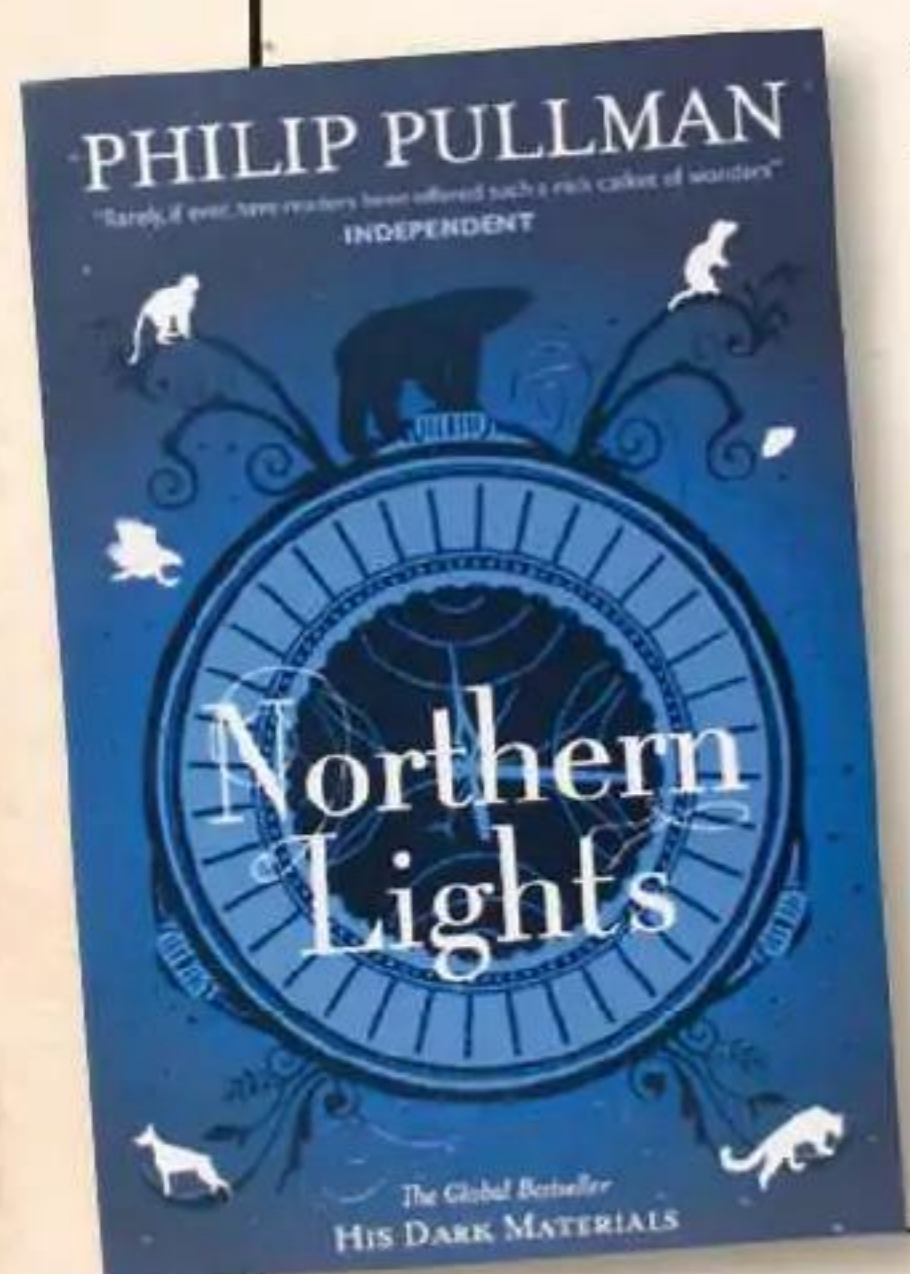
Milton's Satan is a complicated character who has altered perceptions over the centuries, as seen in some fascinating sculptures. Jacob Epstein's *Lucifer* (right) is a towering and unsettling bronze statue completed during the Second World War. The figure's asymmetry, suggestive stance and possible androgyny reflect Satan's sexual tensions in *Paradise Lost* and the poem's description of how "spirits when they please / Can either sex assume, or both". Several decades earlier, Spanish sculptor Ricardo Bellver's *Fallen Angel* portrayed Satan's agonising fall from heaven – a move away from the stern and hypermasculine pre-Miltonic devil.



LITERATURE

Monstrous reading

Frankenstein's monster discovers a book inside an abandoned bag: *Paradise Lost*. The creature assumes that it's a true story, and compares himself to lonely Adam and mistreated Satan. "Like Adam," he reflects, "I was apparently united by no link to any other being in existence... I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition, for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me." More recently, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy drew heavily on the plot and themes of *Paradise Lost*. Its very title borrows the epic's description of the mysterious elements that God employs during the act of creation.



LANDSCAPE ART

Pursuit of happiness

One footpath in San Diego, California, takes the form of a beguiling serpent that turns *Paradise Lost* into a physical journey. Since 1992, artist Alexis Smith's *Snake Path* has invited individuals to walk through temptation, passing a small Edenic garden of fruit trees. Alongside the 170-metre-long path stands a granite statue of an oversized book carved with words from the finale of *Paradise Lost*. In that passage, the angel Michael reminds Adam – and, in turn, readers – about the path to true bliss: "Then wilt thou not be loath / To leave this paradise, but shalt possess / A paradise within thee, happier far."



STAINED GLASS

Window onto the world

During the 19th-century Gothic revival, *Paradise Lost* appeared in stained glass – a form that Milton described as "storied windows richly dight [ie adorned]". The Milton memorial window in St Margaret's Church, Westminster, made by Clayton & Bell in 1888, includes portraits of Milton at various stages of his life: at school, visiting Galileo, dictating to his daughters. Its *Paradise Lost* scenes show Satan rousing the fallen angels in one panel and spying on Adam and Eve in another (left).



MUSIC

Innocence lost

Themes and images from *Paradise Lost* have influenced countless musicians over the decades, from a metal band of the same name to the Red Hot Chili Peppers and rapper Eminem. Lana Del Rey reimagined the epic story in her short film *Tropico*, with songs *Body Electric*, *Gods and Monsters* and *Bel Air* exploring the states of bliss, fall and redemption. It also takes cues from Milton's epic poem: there's a "muttering thunder" when Adam and Eve eat the fruit, while at the end the first couple depart "hand in hand". "It's innocence lost," sings Del Rey (pictured), "like Paradise, Paradise Lost."



Sarah Biffin

An extraordinary artist

One of the most famous British painters of the first half of the 19th century was a woman born without arms or legs. **ALICE LOXTON** explores the life and work of an ambitious artist who became a favourite of royalty and was immortalised by Charles Dickens

The village of East Quantoxhead lies not far from the sea in north Somerset. Its medieval church still stands, a charming stone building with sandstone dressing and a slate roof, set back from the road, bordered by a low wall and surrounded by green fields. This sleepy little spot, a picture-perfect chocolate-box scene, was the birthplace of one of the most entrepreneurial and resolute artists in British history.

What made Sarah Biffin unique was not just her talent but the fact that she had to overcome such significant physical disadvantages. The record of her baptism at the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary in East Quantoxhead on 31 October 1784, when she was six days old, states that the “Daughter of Henry and Sarah Biffin” had been “born without arms or legs”. Yet she never allowed her disability – nor the fact that she was working class, and a woman – to get in the way of her ambition.

“At the age of eight years I was very desirous of acquiring the use of my needle,” she later recalled of her childhood years. “I was continually practising every invention, till at length I could, with my mouth, thread a needle and cut out and make my own dresses.” By the age of 12, she

had taught herself to write by holding a utensil in her mouth.

In 1804, Biffin pushed herself further still. Under the guidance of a showman named Emmanuel Dukes, she learnt the basics of painting. “At the age of 20 I felt anxious to try my skill in the art of painting,” she wrote. “Here a naturally strong inclination prompted an assiduous application, and soon gave a facility to the use of the pencil; with what effect, let my humble productions speak for themselves.”

Later that year, Biffin left her family home to turn her skills into

a career. “It was suggested to my parents that a comfortable living might be obtained by public exhibition,” she said, “and an engagement was arranged for that purpose.”

Over the years that followed, while she was in her early twenties, Biffin travelled extensively, exhibiting at fairs in towns and cities across Britain. Audiences would pay a fee to see her at work as she sewed, wrote and painted.

Astonishing powers

Artworks and archival material now held at the Philip Mould & Company art gallery in London shine a light on this part of Biffin’s life. One large poster advertising her touring exhibition celebrates Biffin’s “astonishing powers” and declares her to be “the greatest wonder in the world”. It also proclaims that “each visitor will be entitled to a specimen of her writing”. Incredibly, some of these specimens have also survived: little pieces of paper given out as souvenirs on which Biffin had – with beautifully formed letters – written her name and sometimes the location and date.

Another surviving object is a handbill advertising her appearance on Tuesday 1 December 1807 at “Mr Henzell’s, Long-Room, Old Flesh Market” in Newcastle. Biffin is described as “of comely Appearance, 22 years of age, and only 37 inches high”. There are practical details at the bottom of the document, including an admission fee (“Children, half price”), and sales talk: “Embrace this opportunity, as another may never offer!”

A turning point in Biffin’s life came in 1808 when she met George Douglas, 16th Earl of Morton, who was so impressed with her skill that he presented her work to King George III, and paid for more artistic training. Her career as a portrait miniaturist began to take off, and commissions soon flooded in. Another big year was 1821, when she took a studio in London, her work made it to the annual exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, and she received a silver medal from the Royal Society of Arts. A few months later she travelled to Brussels, becoming miniature painter to Willem Frederik, future king of the Netherlands.

A short-lived marriage to a man called William

// She travelled to Brussels, becoming miniature painter to Willem Frederik – future king of the Netherlands //



Sarah Biffin (shown here in a self-portrait) was born without arms or legs to a working-class family in rural Somerset – but overcame these challenges to showcase her artistic talents across Britain and beyond

COLLAGE BY **RACHEL DICKENS**

Stephen Wright in 1824 (they appear to have separated soon afterwards) didn't slow Biffin's career, which continued to blossom. She taught in Birmingham, sharing a residence with an assistant, Miss Mary Ann Saunders. In 1830, she moved to Brighton, where George IV bought one of her self-portraits for 25 guineas. Later that year she began working for Augusta Sophia, second daughter of George III, promoting herself as "miniature painter to HRH Princess Augusta".

Even after gaining this royal approval, Biffin didn't rest on her laurels. More determined and entrepreneurial than ever, she hatched plans to make it big in the US. "I am induced to take the advice of some of my friends and apply to you for your opinion respecting an intended project which I have for some time had in mind," she

wrote to an acquaintance in 1841. "This project is to visit America." That year, Biffin moved to Liverpool, the main port for Atlantic crossings. There she spent several years managing a studio and gallery on Bold Street, where members of the public would pay to see her work.

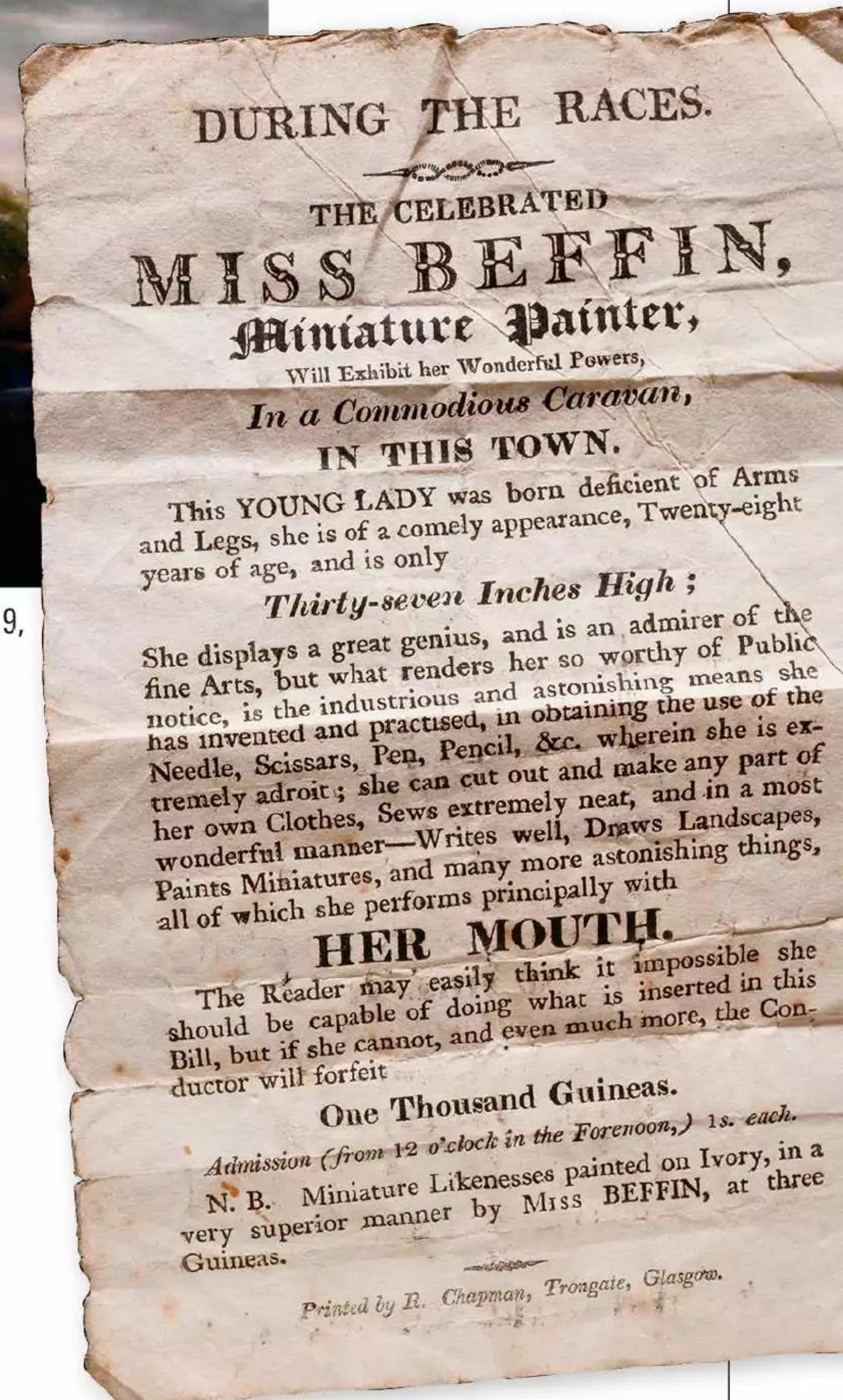
Sadly, Biffin's global ambitions were scuppered by ill health. She died in 1850, aged 65, in her home at 8 Duke Street in Liverpool. Her death certificate cites the cause as a "disordered stomach and breaking up of the constitution". Her gravestone, which stood at St James Cemetery, Liverpool, but no longer survives, declared her to have been "Gifted with singular talents as an artist," going on to say that "thousands have been gratified with the able productions of her pencil, while her versatile conversation and agreeable manners elicited the admiration of all."



Sarah Biffin demonstrates her skills in Bury St Edmunds in 1810. Visitors paid an admission fee to watch her sew, write and paint



Princess Augusta Sophia, pictured c1819, for whom Biffin painted miniatures



A handbill printed in Glasgow c1812 advertises "The Celebrated Miss Biffin", emphasising her "great genius" and "comely appearance"

Biffin's fame was immense during her lifetime. While her siblings continued to live in sleepy East Quantoxhead, she became a 19th-century household name who was referenced in three Charles Dickens novels. The great painter Sir Thomas Lawrence is said to have declared that he "would rather have one of his pictures copied by Miss Biffin than by any artist he was acquainted with".

Revived reputation

During the 20th century, her name rather faded into obscurity – but it's now back in the spotlight: the Sarah Biffin revival is on. When a self-portrait was auctioned at Sotheby's in 2019, the estimate was £800–£1,200 – but it fetched £137,500. And in 2022, Philip Mould & Company dedicated a major exhibition to her work – "Without Hands: The Art of Sarah Biffin" – bringing together many of her pieces for the first time. Alongside exquisite miniature portraits were meticulously rendered studies of feathers, showcasing an extraordinary technical ability

and beautifully delicate handling of watercolour.

Aside from her artistic skill, it is Biffin's spirit that captivates. Newspapers of the day championed "the earnestness with which she has struggled, and the perseverance with which she has laboured, to attain by her own efforts an honourable independence". Not only did she excel in a society in which she seemed to have no place, she used her

physical disability to break through barriers and thrive outside social and cultural norms. She gained recognition as a female artist, supported herself financially, and often went further even than non-disabled women of the day.

Importantly, she never allowed her disability to restrict her ambitions, and even championed it. "Sarah Biffin", she signed her works, adding proudly: "Without hands." **H**

Alice Loxton is the author of *Eighteen: A History of Britain in 18 Young Lives* (Pan MacMillan, 2024)



Listen to an episode of BBC Radio 4's **Front Row** in which artist Alison Lapper discusses Sarah Biffin at [bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001dmzz](https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001dmzz)



// She used her physical disability to break through barriers and thrive outside social and cultural norms //



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Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

What was the dance marathon craze of the Great Depression?

»»» Contests in which couples danced for extended periods – in some cases, many weeks on end – became a feature of Depression-era America. Participants competed for prize money, or simply for the free food and shelter such competitions provided to often poor and hungry participants.

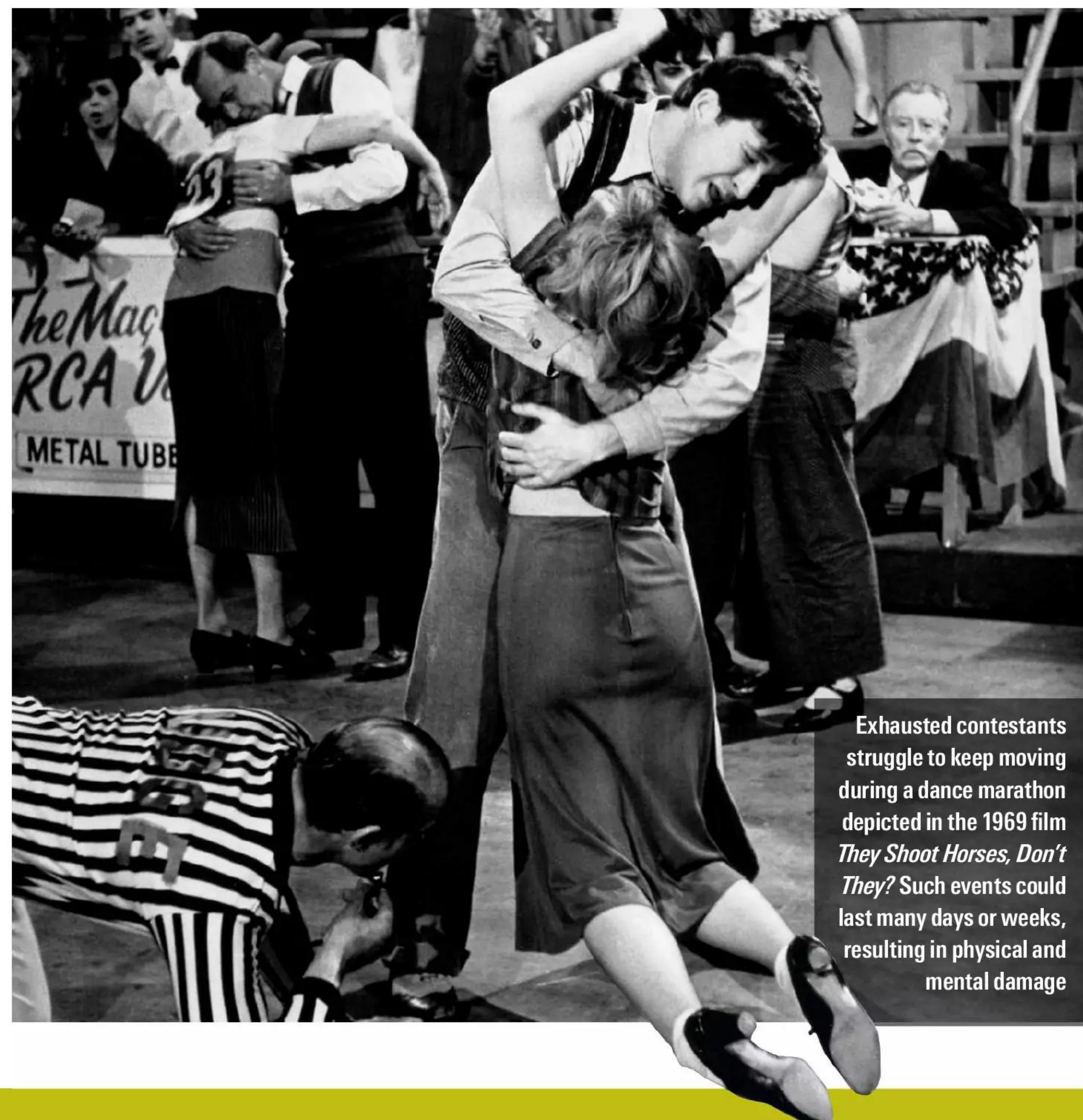
Rules varied but, generally, contestants had to keep their feet moving, with regular short breaks permitted. In one Chicago dance marathon in 1930, nine couples were still moving 145 days after the contest started.

Some competitors, such as June Havoc – later a Broadway star – became ‘professional’ marathon dancers, able to fall asleep instantly in the pauses.

The 1969 film *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, starring Jane Fonda and Michael Sarrazin, is reckoned to provide a realistic portrayal of a typical dance marathon. It was based on a novel by Horace McCoy, who had worked as a dance-hall bouncer in the Depression.

Paying audiences could yield big profits for the ruthless showmen running the marathons, reflecting an appetite for watching others being demeaned. These events were criticised as being degrading and cruel, sometimes resulting in mental and physical breakdowns. By the late 1930s, dance marathons were banned in many US cities.

.....
Eugene Byrne, author and journalist



Exhausted contestants struggle to keep moving during a dance marathon depicted in the 1969 film *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* Such events could last many days or weeks, resulting in physical and mental damage



A copy of a third-century BC bust of Alexander the Great. His exploits made an indelible mark on history – but his tomb has been lost

Where is Alexander the Great's body?

»»» On the death of the great empire-builder in 323 BC, aged just 32, chaos engulfed his Macedonian domain as rival leaders vied for power. To this day, the cause of his death in Babylon remains a mystery – was it a disease or poison? – and the location of his final resting place is also unknown.

Two years after his death, the body began its journey to Macedonia for burial – but one of Alexander's generals, the future pharaoh Ptolemy I Soter, intercepted the coffin and took it to Egypt. It was interred first at Memphis and then reburied in the city he had named after himself, Alexandria. There it was installed as the talisman of a cult, venerated by the Ptolemaic dynasty for nearly three centuries.

Various Roman emperors and later writers are reported to have visited the tomb – but at some point its whereabouts were forgotten, despite dozens of attempts to find it. Theories about its location abound: it's been suggested that it lies beneath another building, possibly the Nabi Daniel Mosque, or underwater, along with much of the city's palace complex. Historian Andrew Chugg has recently suggested that ninth-century Venetian merchants took the body, in the belief that they had found the remains of the gospel writer Mark the Evangelist. If that's correct, then Alexander's final resting place is St Mark's Basilica in Venice.

.....
Jonny Wilkes, freelance writer

ALAMY/AG

DID YOU KNOW...?

Fruity fables

For nearly two millennia it was believed that hedgehogs rolled onto fruit, attaching it to their spines to carry it to their dens. In AD 77, Pliny the Elder asserted that the creatures fixed fallen apples on their spines. As recently as 1867, one of Charles Darwin's correspondents claimed that he had seen hedgehogs trotting along carrying a dozen strawberries. Darwin seems to have believed him – though in fact hedgehogs eat mostly small invertebrates, not fruit.



Explosive accident

In March 1922, 19 teenage girls – some as young as 13 and 14 – were killed by a massive explosion while dismantling redundant rifle cartridges left over from the First World War. The catastrophe, at an unlicensed factory in Tipton in Staffordshire, occurred when a large cache of the ammunition was accidentally detonated. The home secretary ordered a formal investigation; the factory manager was tried for manslaughter, found guilty and sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

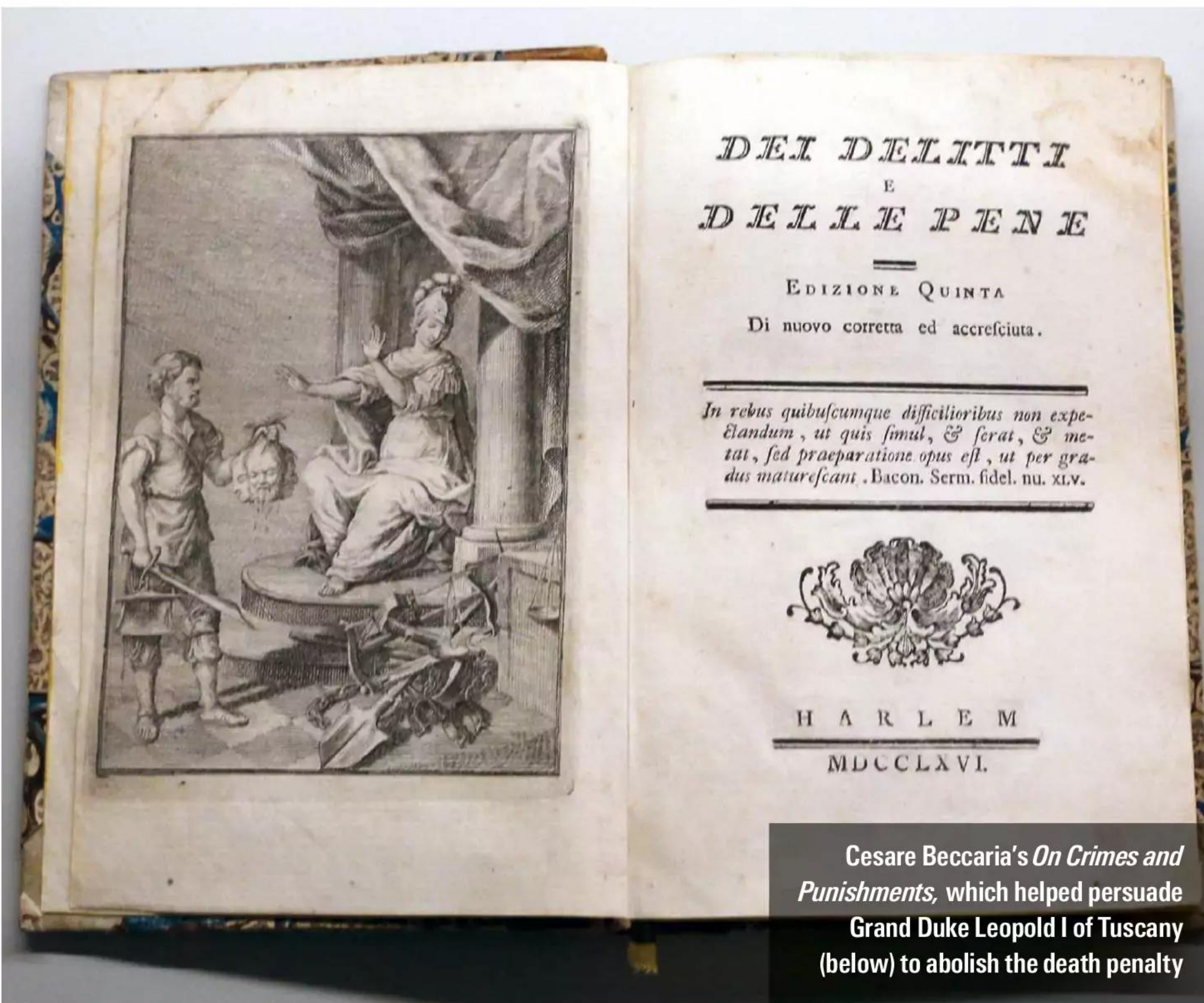
No love lost

The first of Richard Wagner's operas to be performed, *Das Liebesverbot* (*The Ban on Love*), was based on Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* – but proved far less successful. Its premiere in 1836 was spoiled when one of the lead singers forgot the words, resorting instead to improvisation. The second performance was cancelled after the prima donna's husband and the lead tenor had a furious fistfight before the curtain even rose, thus disappointing the three people in the audience.

The opera was never again performed in Wagner's lifetime.

.....
Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history

A 20th-century score of Wagner's comic opera *Das Liebesverbot*



Cesare Beccaria's *On Crimes and Punishments*, which helped persuade Grand Duke Leopold I of Tuscany (below) to abolish the death penalty

Which was the first modern state to abolish the death penalty?

»»» The Grand Duchy of Tuscany was the first modern state to abolish capital punishment, in 1786. Tuscany and its capital, Florence, had a long tradition of intellectual inquiry going back to figures such as Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) for whom the Medici grand dukes had been important patrons. By the mid-18th century, however, the house of Medici had died out. It was the Grand Duke Leopold I, of the Habsburg family, who made the change. During his reign (1765–90), revolutions racked America and France. But Leopold was one of the 'enlightened despots' who combined a belief in his royal destiny to rule with Enlightenment ideas about rationalism, freedom and progress.

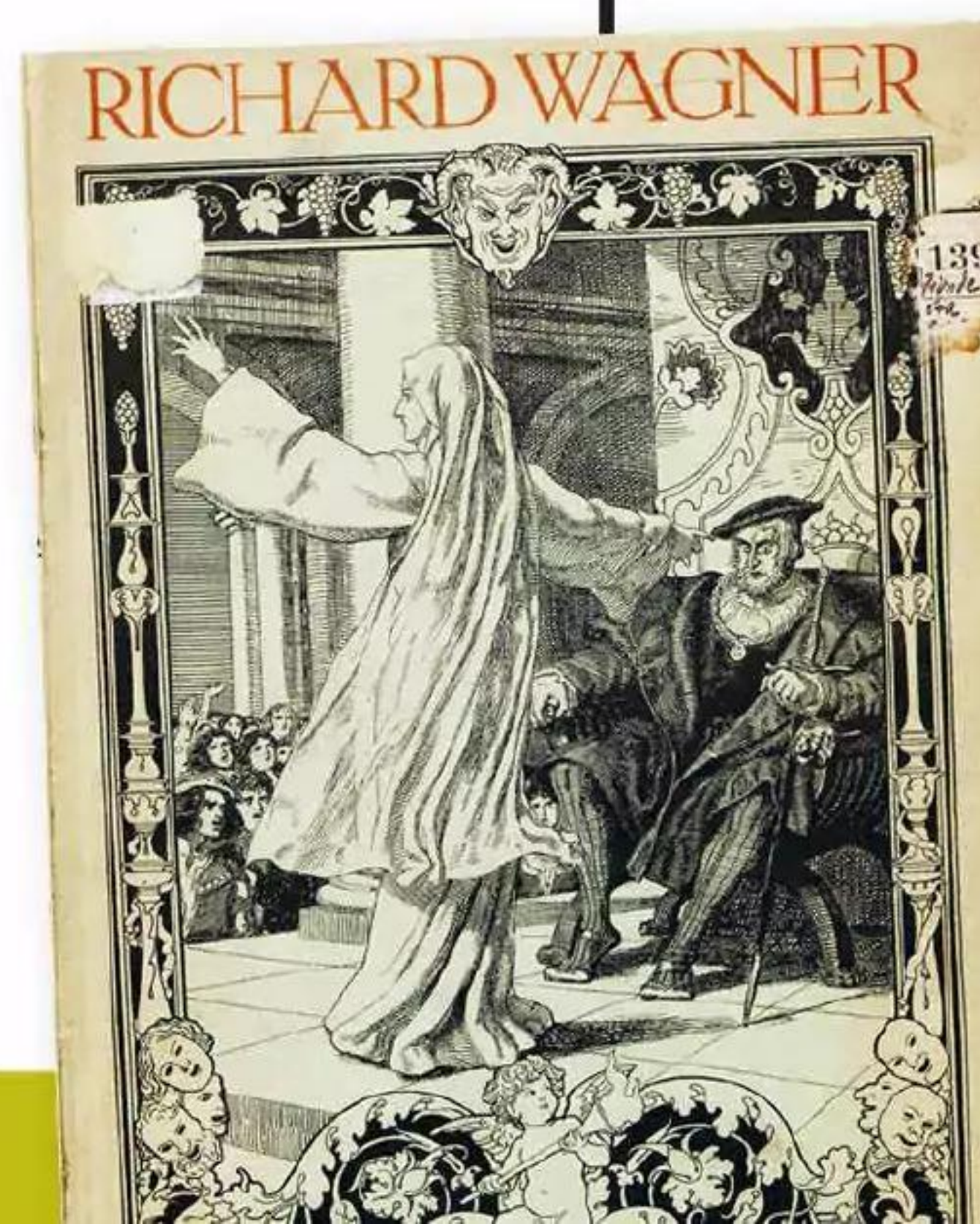
An important influence on the decision was Cesare Beccaria, a Milanese thinker whose book *On Crimes and Punishments* had been published in 1764. Beccaria was a leading figure of the Italian Enlightenment, and his treatise made a major contribution to the development of criminology. He pointed out that many laws dated

back to "barbarous ages", and argued for the abolition of torture and the death penalty. His work was grounded in a theory of utility (maximising total human happiness) that was later more fully developed by English philosopher Jeremy Bentham. Beccaria's ideas were controversial, and initially published anonymously. However, after his work was positively received by figures ranging from Catherine the Great of Russia to Thomas Jefferson, he put his name to it.

Within five years of the publication of Beccaria's book, Grand Duke Leopold had effectively put a stop to executions in his duchy, although the formal abolition had to wait another two decades. From the 1790s, capital punishment was periodically reinstated, often justified by military or political emergencies.

It was abolished once again when Tuscany joined the new Kingdom of Italy in 1860.

.....
Catherine Fletcher, professor of history at Manchester Metropolitan University



...Indian summer?

»»» In many European languages, a spell of good weather in late autumn is known as 'old wives' summer', but in English it is an 'Indian summer'. Perhaps the greatest surprise in the history of this phrase is how easily this American coinage conquered the entire English-speaking world.

The earliest written mention of the term dates from the end of the 18th century. By the time John Galsworthy published *Indian Summer of a Forsyte* in 1918, the phrase had long been familiar in Britain, even though many in the UK believed the term referred to India.

In fact, 'Indian' here relates to Native Americans, stemming from the idea that such a short, unseasonable warm period was used for activities peculiar to the customs or habits of native populations – yet no one knew what those were. Suggestions that they involved hunting, setting fires or even attacking white settlements lack conviction.

The riddle was solved by

Dr Matthew R Halley, writing in the September 2017 issue of the indispensable periodical *Notes and Queries*. He published a clipping from an early American newspaper that contains a reasonable explanation. An annual fair was long held in Philadelphia, beginning on the last Wednesday in November and often coinciding with a few days of pleasant weather.

While such fairs existed, they were regularly attended by native people who brought all kinds of articles to exchange for whatever they could find at the fair. Those gatherings were discontinued soon after 1788 – but the phrase endured, recalling those autumn events.



.....
Anatoly Liberman,
professor and author of
*An Analytic Dictionary
of English Etymology*
(University of Minnesota
Press, 2008)



Catherine II ('the Great'), empress of Russia,
pictured on her horse, Brillante, in a
contemporary equestrian portrait

Is there any truth to the rumours that Catherine the Great was killed by a horse?

»»» Despite the popularity of this pernicious, enduring myth, the answer is an unequivocal no. Today, that empress of Russia (reigned 1762–96) is celebrated by some for modernising her country and establishing the empire as a global player. However, Catherine II had enemies in the imperial court and beyond – and they kept the rumour mill turning.

A favoured topic for scurrilous attacks was her sex life. Catherine was painted as a nymphomaniac with unnatural perversions and an insatiable desire for younger men. She wasn't the first to feel the barbs of such accusations, of course. Throughout history, rumours against powerful women have tended to focus on promiscuity or deviancy: think of Cleopatra, Marie Antoinette, Anne Boleyn – the list goes on. But the story spread about Catherine's demise was especially graphic.

It was claimed that she was crushed by a horse during an attempt at bestiality, after the harness and pulley system holding her to her stallion broke. The truth is much more mundane: Catherine died in November 1796 after suffering a stroke while in her washroom. JW

GETTY IMAGES

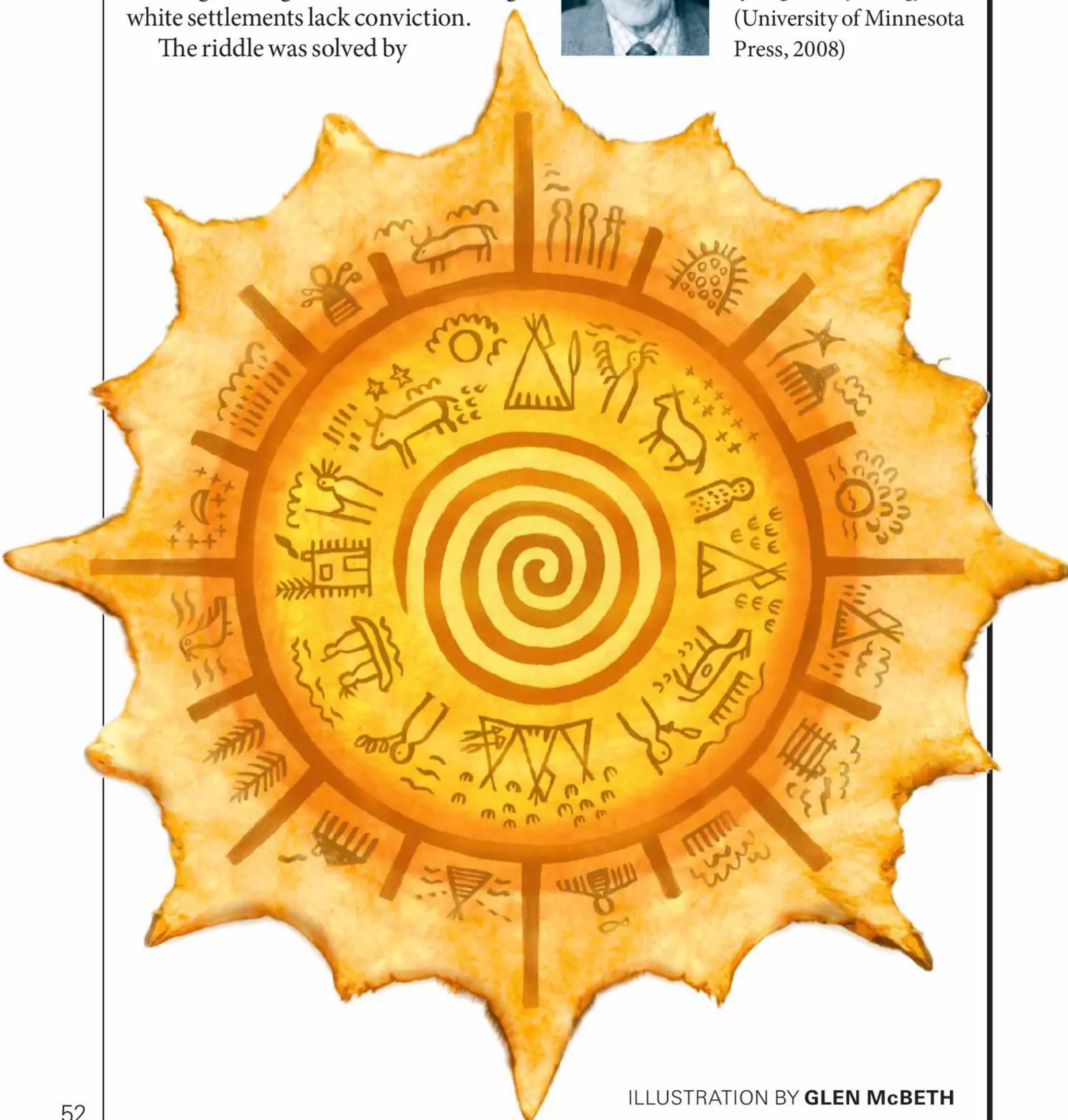


ILLUSTRATION BY GLEN McBETH



A 19th-century depiction of the 1618 Defenestration of Prague, the last in a series of religious clashes that resulted in officials being thrown from windows in the capital of Bohemia

What were the Defenestrations of Prague?

»»» The Czech capital has enjoyed a colourful history that features no fewer than three defenestrations – events in which people were thrown out of windows.

The first was on 30 July 1419, when a procession of Hussites – followers of the proto-Protestant religious reformer Jan Hus, who had been executed in 1415 – stormed Prague's New Town Hall. A number of officials, including the burgomaster (chief magistrate), were tossed out of the window and killed. This sparked the Hussite Wars against Catholic forces that raged in Bohemia into the 1430s.

This mode of protest seemed to take on a symbolic significance for the reformers. So when religious violence once more erupted in Prague in 1483, Hussites employed similar

measures, defenestrating a number of councillors from various windows at civic buildings across the city.

The most famous defenestrations occurred in 1618 – fuelled by religion, unsurprisingly. The previous year, Archduke Ferdinand of Austria had been elected king of Bohemia, leading Protestants to fear that the devout Catholic ruler would reverse laws granting them religious freedoms. They had reason to worry: Ferdinand halted the building of churches and arrested those who protested.

On 23 May 1618, a mob of Bohemian Protestants descended on Prague. Led by a veteran soldier, Count Thurn, they confronted the Catholic imperial agents in a third-floor room of Prague Castle. Two men were

allowed to leave, but two others – Counts Vilém Slavata and Jaroslav Martinic – were bundled out of the window, along with their secretary, Filip Fabricius.

Despite falling more than 20 metres, all three men walked away mostly unharmed. Catholics declared this proof of God's protection – to which Protestants responded by claiming that the men's landing had been cushioned by a dung heap. Regardless of how they survived, this defenestration is remembered most for the aftermath. The event sparked a full-blown revolt against Ferdinand, who became Holy Roman Emperor the following year. That in turn plunged Europe into one of the bloodiest conflicts in its history: the Thirty Years' War. **JW**



The name 'cappuccino' reflected the colour of coffee mixed with cream, which resembles the brown of Capuchin friars' habits

What are the origins of the cappuccino?

»»» In 18th-century Austria, the word *kapuziner* or *capsuziner* was used for a glass of coffee mixed with cream, the colour of which echoed the brown hue of the habits worn by Capuchin friars. During the 19th century, during the period of Habsburg domination over the northern Italian states prior to unification, this usage spread into Italy. Early 20th-century tourist guidebooks explained that cappuccino was served in a smaller cup and contained less milk than a *caffè latte*.

Today's cappuccino evolved in parallel with the espresso machine – a quintessentially Italian invention that appeared just before the

First World War. This uses steam to brew coffee under pressure, and is equipped with projecting wands used to warm milk. As these became more powerful, so the habit of frothing or foaming milk developed.

The character of coffee itself was fundamentally altered after 1948 when Achille Gaggia revolutionised the design of these machines to extract the hot espresso at much higher pressures. **H**

.....
Jonathan Morris, professor of history, University of Hertfordshire, and author of *Coffee: A Global History* (Reaktion, 2018)

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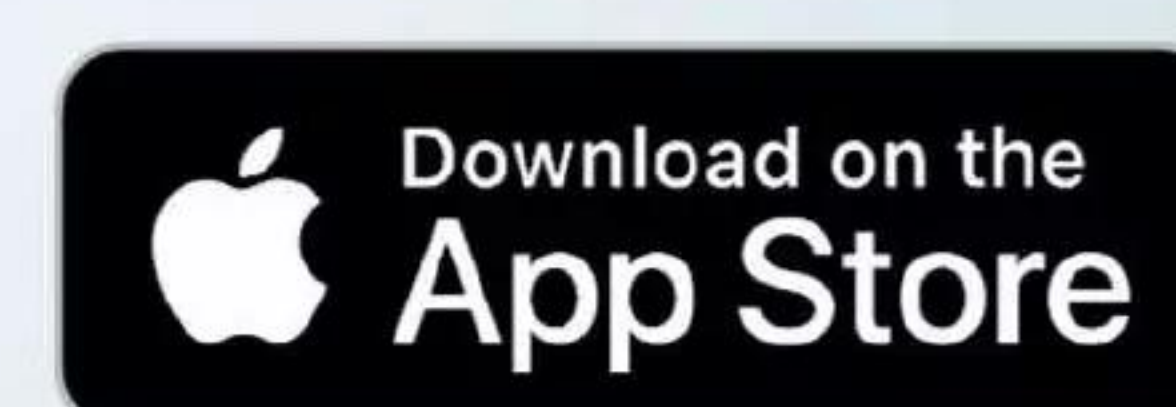
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LORD LUCAN

LOWER
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STREET SW

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO LORD LUCAN?

Accompanies
the new BBC
Radio 4 series
The Lucan Obsession

BBC
RADIO 4



LADY LUCAN

Fifty years after the notorious peer vanished following the murder of his children's nanny, **Laura Thompson** reviews the case of the gambling earl – and explores what it reveals about social attitudes of the time



SANDRA RIVETT, NANNY

GETTY IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK/
TOPFOTO

HOUSE OF HORRORS

A police officer guards 46 Lower Belgrave Street, the Lucan family home, following the murder of nanny Sandra Rivett and the violent assault on Veronica Lucan on the night of 7 November 1974. The earl himself vanished the following morning, and has never been conclusively located

Just before 9pm on Thursday 7 November 1974, the rarefied calm of Belgravia, that oasis of white stucco in the heart of London, was defiled by violence. Behind the stately façade of 46 Lower Belgrave Street, family home of the 7th Earl of Lucan, 29-year-old nanny Sandra Rivett descended from the top of the six-storey house into the basement to make tea. In the darkness, an assailant was waiting. Sandra was bludgeoned to death with a length of piping, bundled into a sack and left on the bloodied kitchen floor.

Shortly afterwards, near the top of the basement stairs, another woman – 37-year-old Veronica Lucan, the earl's estranged wife – was similarly battered. She fought off her attacker and, just before 10pm, burst into the Plumbers Arms pub at the end of Lower Belgrave Street. The late-evening customers were confronted with the sight of a small, barefoot woman, her head coated with blood.

"Help me, help me – I've just escaped from being murdered!" she exclaimed, followed by: "My children, my children – he's murdered my nanny!"

From that moment, the story became public property. Shortly afterwards, police kicked in the elegant door of the Lucan home. There, within the formal interior, they found Sandra Rivett's body.

Upstairs were the three children who had been in her care: Frances, aged 10; George, seven; and four-year-old Camilla. No trace of an assailant was discovered. Quite soon, however, the identity of the man whom Veronica Lucan claimed had "murdered my nanny" would be known to Scotland Yard detectives.

From her bed in hospital, where she'd received 60 stitches to close her head wound, Veronica stated that the attacker had been her husband, Lord Lucan – 39-year-old Richard John Bingham, a professional gambler nicknamed 'Lucky'.

It was then, too, that the 'official' theory about the case was formed – a version of events that was instantly accepted by the police and which, even after half a century of speculation, has never been supplanted. According to this narrative, Sandra Rivett, who should have had the night off, was murdered in error, her killer mistakenly believing that the woman descending into the basement was Lady Lucan. When Veronica herself appeared around 9pm, Lord Lucan

FAREWELL, FRIEND

Susan Maxwell-Scott, who was the last person known to have seen Lord Lucan, at her Sussex home on the night of the attacks



FAMILY TIES

Christina Shand Kydd, Lady Lucan's sister, with her husband Bill in 1971. Their behaviour after the earl's disappearance reinforced perceptions of 'the Establishment' closing ranks



WALKING WOUNDED

Veronica Lucan pictured a week after the assault, the wound on her head visible beneath her hat. The previous summer, she had won a bitter and expensive custody battle against the earl



realised his mistake and attacked her, but wasn't able to finish the job.

The Lucans had lived separately since January 1973. In July that year, Veronica had won a vicious custody battle that cost Lucan around £20,000, and which he was obsessed with overturning. He became deeply concerned for his children, not least because Lady Lucan suffered with a number of mental health problems which, he judged, might leave her unable to care for them adequately. By this point he was drinking heavily and gambling more heavily still. It seemed, then, that his motive for killing his wife was strong, both financially and emotionally. Sandra, who had been employed for just 10 weeks, was the collateral damage.

After Veronica ran to the pub, Lord Lucan also left the house. Almost nothing is known of his movements thereafter. From an unidentified location, he rang his mother, Kaitilin, the dowager countess and a Labour party activist, asking her to collect the children. According to her, he added: "Oh mother, there was something terrible in the basement. I couldn't bring myself to look."

Some time before midnight he visited the home of Susan Maxwell-Scott, a friend in Uckfield, Sussex. At the 1975 inquest into

Sandra Rivett's death, Susan related the story that she said Lucan had offered her: he had been passing the house in Belgravia, saw a fight going on in the basement and rushed in to interrupt it, whereupon Veronica accused him of hiring a hitman.

This story was also told in a letter, post-marked Uckfield, sent to Lucan's brother-in-law, Bill Shand Kydd. "V. has demonstrated her hatred for me in the past and would do anything to see me accused," Lucan wrote. At some point in the early hours, he wrote two letters to an old friend, Michael Stoop.

The car that the suspect had been driving, a Ford Corsair borrowed from Stoop, was found on Sunday 10 November, parked in a residential street in the port of Newhaven, some 17 miles from Uckfield. Lord Lucan himself had disappeared.

Cause celebre

It is not hard to understand why this case became an immediate cause celebre. It had everything, including a mystery – whither the vanished earl? – that remains unsolved to this day. The most famous murders carry both a mythic element of the timeless and an atmospheric imprint of their time – and none more so than this one.

It was a parable of class, of the high-born brought low, of aristocratic hubris. But the flavour of the story – the peculiar piquancy of its social context – is that of the early 1970s. Before the murder, Lord Lucan – pinstriped and sleek in the age of T-Rex and Wimpy bars – had proceeded every day from Belgravia to the Clermont Club, an elite gambling house on Berkeley Square, while the three-day week and the oil crisis raged in a troubled country that settled down at night to watch *Upstairs, Downstairs*.

Lucan, living a seigneurial life on an income of £12,000 a year (around £110,000 in today's terms), could not have existed in a later era. His kind – aristocrats with neither sufficient means nor the will to earn them – were on the edge of extinction. In an earlier age, he would not have been so profoundly incongruous, and his life would probably have been quite different.

In 1974, his rebarbative image, looming arrogantly from every newspaper, was – to use a then-unknown phrase – supremely triggering. There was never a second of doubt about his guilt, though the case against him rested upon the word of Veronica, Lady Lucan. She was portrayed as frail yet impressively indomitable, perhaps



Gone but not forgotten Read about 10 other mysterious disappearances from history in an article on our website: historyextra.com/mystery-disappearances



THE CHIPS ARE DOWN

Lord Lucan was a regular gambler at the Clermont Club in Berkeley Square, Mayfair, where his nickname, 'Lucky', proved to be less than apt: on more than one occasion he lost many thousands of pounds

rather reminiscent of Diana, Princess of Wales in a later era.

Arguably the strongest evidence against the earl was that he had run away. So much for the mottos of the old school tie (in his case, Eton) that mandated facing the music and behaving like a gentleman. Here was proof that 'They' were no better than 'Us' – an intensely satisfying narrative.

The national mood was summed up by a letter to the *Daily Express* printed on 20 November 1974: "The ordinary people of this country are accustomed to being told how lazy and greedy they have become and how they must make greater sacrifices," it said. "If I were a miner, factory worker or railwayman and I had read of Lord Lucan's lifestyle (rise at noon, lunch at the Clermont, gambling losses of £5,000 in one afternoon) I would have said a few well chosen words when my alarm went off this morning."

Britain was bankrupt and volatile, crippled by strikes, high energy costs and taxation. This was also the year of the IRA pub bombings. On the night of 7 November, as the first detective was entering 46 Lower Belgrave Street, two people were killed at a pub near Woolwich Royal Artillery Barracks.



The case seemed to confirm a communal belief that **those who belong to 'the Establishment' can get away with things**

A couple of weeks previously, there had been a minor explosion at Brooks's club in St James's Street. The world of Lord Lucan was not, in fact, immune to the national situation, but it certainly looked that way.

Had Lucan been arrested and tried, there would have been a glorious sense of catharsis. Instead, he continued to evade justice. "Where is this jerk? He's giving me a headache," was how Detective-Sergeant Graham Forsyth, the officer assigned as Lady Lucan's de facto bodyguard, summed up the general mood. Yet there was also a kind of pleasure within the frustrated rage at the way that this story was playing out. It was confirming a communal belief that those who belong to 'the Establishment' can get away with things.

"Lord Lucan has so many friends. There is so much money around," said Eunice Hensby, Sandra Rivett's mother, at her daughter's inquest, which opened on 16 June 1975 and ended with a guilty verdict against Lucan.

Trial by media

Having been fixated on the earl for seven months, the press now lamented the fact that there was so little focus upon his victim. "It was Lucan's aristocratic family and gambling friends who dominated," wrote the *Sunday*

Lord Lucan

WHAT LIES BENEATH

Police divers prepare to search Newhaven harbour in November 1974 after the car driven by Lord Lucan was found nearby. No trace of the missing earl was discovered



ABANDONED EVIDENCE

The Ford Corsair used by Lucan, abandoned in Norman Road, Newhaven on the morning of the murder. Whether he drove it there himself remains open to question

Mirror, railing against this “ugly real-life performance of *Upstairs, Downstairs*”. It claimed that ranks had closed against Veronica, “who dared to accuse her vanished husband, the Seventh Earl of Lucan. Damned bad show, don’tcherknow.” Alluding to the fact that Bill Shand Kydd and his wife – Lady Lucan’s sister – had spent 19 June at the races, the editorial concluded: “What with the beastly inquest, into the bargain it was Ascot Week, too!”

A highly persuasive article by the writer James Fox, published in the *Sunday Times Magazine* a few days earlier, had set the prevailing mood in elegant stone. Lucan was a cold, aggressive throwback, it suggested, a monstrous emblem of male privilege. His wife was a quasi-feminist figure, an intelligent modern woman who, despite her struggles with depression, had stood up to Lucan and suffered for it. His friends, ranged stubbornly on his side, were also “condescending, almost patronising” towards the police investigation.

This last, of course, played into the belief – strongly implied from early on – that Lucan had been helped to flee justice. The circle of upper-class gamblers who congregated at the Clermont – the “Eton Mafia”, as Scotland Yard called them – would, it was suggested,

Lucan was a man whose sole status came from a minor title, teetering on the brink of bankruptcy

do anything for one of their own, the freedom of an earl being worth more than the life of a servant in their ghastly antique code.

A melting waxwork

It is a belief that dies hard. Yet 50 years on, now that the Lucan case is ‘history’ and the societal anger that occluded it has calmed, its nuances should surely be clearer to see. Since the death of Lady Lucan in 2017 it has, for instance, become possible to question her testimony which, during her lifetime, was presented as a kind of gospel. One can also criticise the conduct of the police; no other suspect was even considered, so in essence there was no investigation. There was, however, a good deal of relish among the police at having the ‘nobs’ in their power. Indeed, Lucan’s friends became useful scapegoats for police failure to find the man himself, that intoxicating hate figure who had quite possibly got away with murder because that is what the rich and powerful did.

Yet Lucan merely *looked* rich and powerful. In fact, he was a weak man, though liked by many, including those who thought him capable of eliminating a woman he had come to hate (others thought him innocent). He could scarcely have been more remote from



ONGOING INTEREST

Newspaper stories claiming to have traced Lucan's movements continued to run decades after his disappearance – this headline in the *Daily Mirror* appeared in 2012

the image that has long held sway, glued into position by our healthy national resentment of two-tier justice, our love of schadenfreude, our pleasure in such a glaring – almost cartoonish – proof that 'the Establishment' is as rotten as we wish to believe.

In truth – as should also now be clear – Lucan was 'Establishment' on paper only. He was a man whose sole status came from a minor title, living off a couple of family trusts, teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. And an earl without proper means was, by the 1970s, a figure with no authority at all: a melting waxwork, paid to sit at the Clermont tables and dress the house for the truly rich and powerful – the ones with oil money. Yet within the British psyche, the class system exerted its strange, illogical, atavistic pull. It would do still, I think, should the case occur today. **H**

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Laura Thompson is the author of *A Different Class of Murder: The Story of Lord Lucan* (Bloomsbury, 2014)

 Listen to new BBC Radio 4 series **The Lucan Obsession**, starting on Monday 28 October – and also look out for the forthcoming BBC Two documentary **Lucan**

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY



FINAL VERDICT?

Lord Lucan's son, George Bingham (above), outside London's High Court in 2016, when he was at last declared the 8th Earl of Lucan. Also at court was Neil Berriman (right), son of Sandra Rivett, who believes that Lucan is alive in Australia



AN ENDURING MYSTERY

Theories about Lord Lucan's fate continue to swirl

In 1992, the high court made this declaration: "Be it known that the Right Honourable Richard John Bingham, 7th Earl of Lucan, died on or since the eighth day of November 1974."

That, effectively, was an acceptance of the evidence of Susan Maxwell-Scott, who said that Lucan drove away from her house in Uckfield in the early hours of 8 November. Of course, that statement is unprovable. The car that Lucan was driving was seen, parked in Newhaven, in the early morning of that November day – but there was no way to prove who had driven it there. So it is possible that Lucan was at that moment being flown out of the country – and even that he is, at the age of nearly 90, still alive today.

Indeed, in 1999 his son, George, was refused permission to take his seat in the House of Lords, there being reasonable doubt as to whether the title was his to assume. It was not until 2016 that George became the 8th Earl of Lucan – and even then, his accession did not mark an end to speculation about the fate of his father.

In the past 50 years, Lucan has been 'seen' all around the world. He has been identified as, among many other people, a pot-smoking hippy in Goa. When disgraced Labour MP John Stonehouse was arrested in Australia in December 1974, having faked his own death, he was apprehended in the belief that he

was Lucan. There have even been claims that the earl himself was murdered.

The detective who headed the investigation – and who at the time was wholly convinced that Lucan had killed himself – later signed a book deal to explore his powerful new conviction that the earl was in Botswana. The son of Sandra Rivett, adopted at birth but understandably possessed with an urge to achieve justice, pursues a belief that Lucan is now a Buddhist living in Australia.

I myself agree with the 1992 statement by the high court. If there was a plan to help Lucan escape, it was dreamed up by his friends – most of whom were tapped-out gamblers rather than masters of the universe – on the spur of the moment, yet was so watertight that it has succeeded in keeping him hidden and alive for half a century. I find this impossible to accept, not least because the cost involved would have been immense.

To my mind, Lucan knew that Newhaven was the journey's end. His words in a final letter to Michael Stoop – "when you come across my children, which I hope you will, please tell them that you knew me and that all I cared about was them" – read like a signing-off. Then he threw in his hand, and jumped into the English Channel.

Other theories are available.

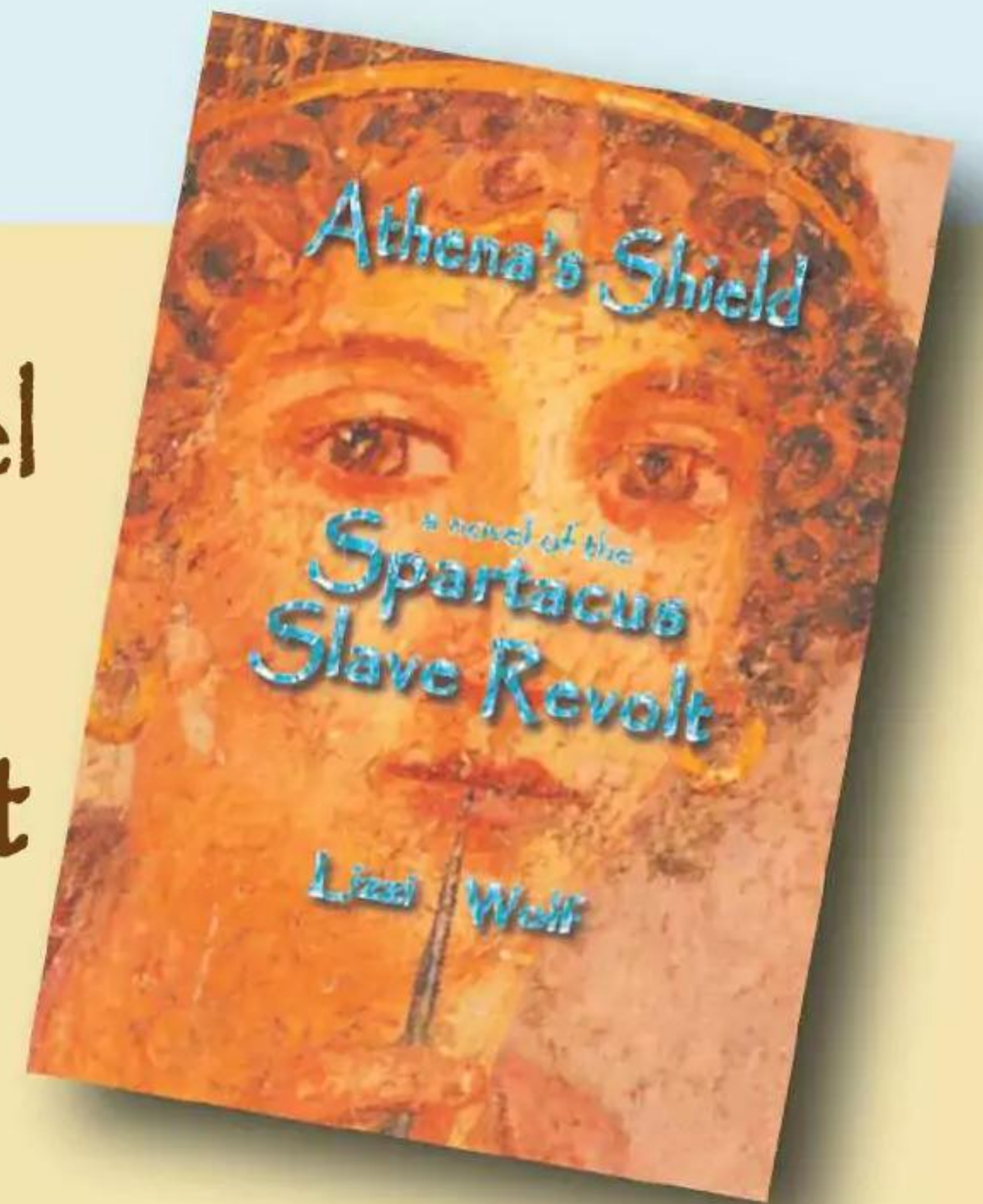
Her father is the most celebrated gladiator in all of Rome.

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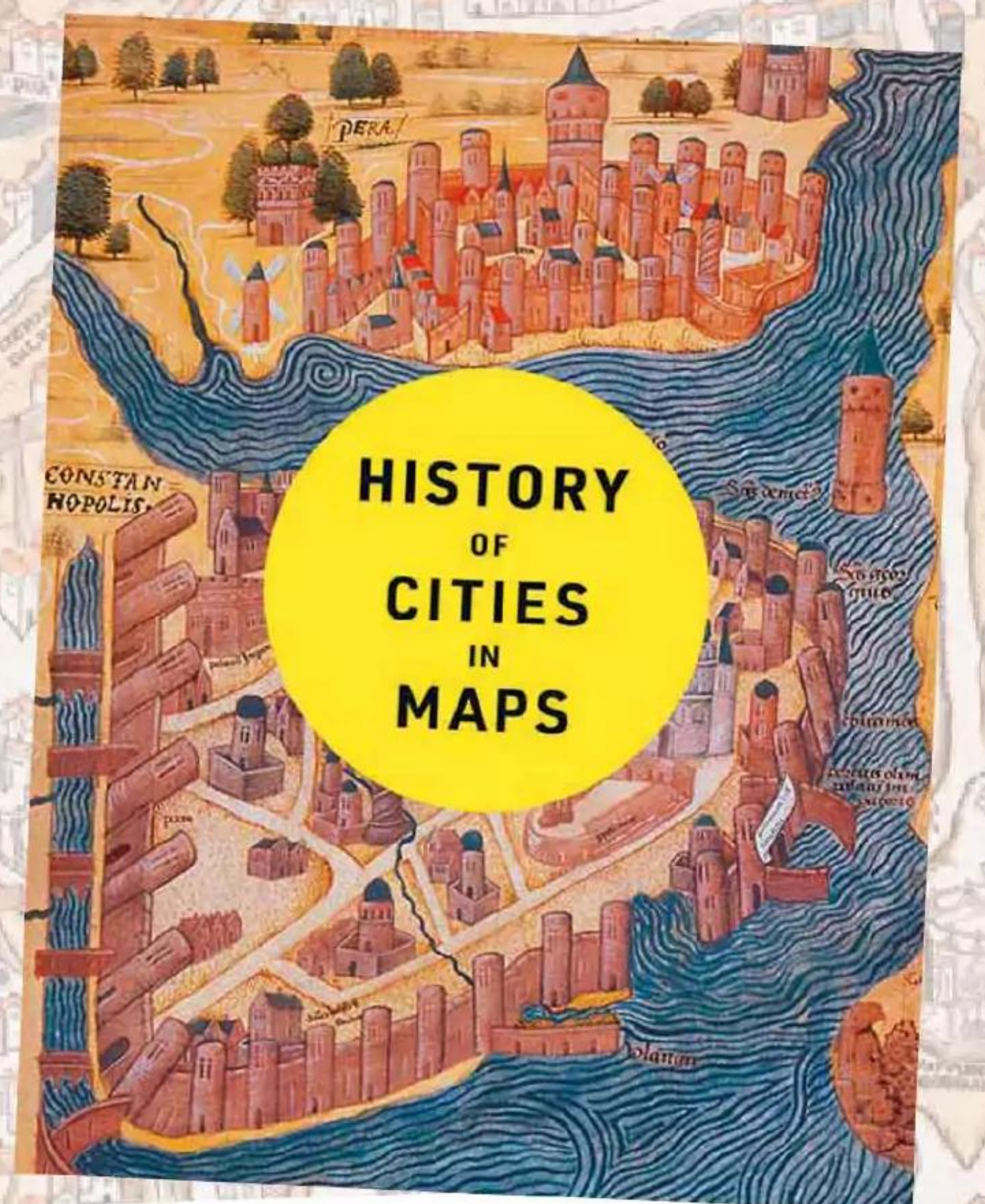


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Medieval influencers



Women in the Middle Ages rarely wielded political or economic power – yet, a little like the most persuasive doyennes of social media today, their words could shape minds and lives far beyond their own circles.

Hetta Howes introduces four female literary and spiritual trailblazers

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROSE WILKINSON



The poet who felt women's pain

Marie de France's writings were fired by a thirst for glory – and a sympathy for the sufferings of her gender

"The one who forgets herself is foolish," wrote Marie de France. "Here I write my name, 'Marie', so that I will be remembered."

We know little of Marie, a 12th-century French writer who spent time in England – we believe in the court of Henry II and his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, both of whom were energetic patrons of the arts. She is undoubtedly the most enigmatic of the four women on these pages. But what we do know, thanks to a collection of *lais* – short poems that were most likely set to music to be performed at court – is that she challenged perceptions of female writers, and women more generally, in a deeply patriarchal society.

Marie was well educated, leading historians to speculate that she must have been a noblewoman and perhaps even a nun. We also know that she was successful. The prologue to her *lais* offers insights into her experience of entering a male-dominated profession. Anyone who has received the gift of eloquence, she insists, has a duty not to remain silent. She describes how she worked on the *lais* "late into the night", hoping that they would win her "glory". She set her sights high, dedicating the collection to the king himself.

Although many of the *lais* were translations of Breton stories, Marie put her own spin on them, populating them with resourceful heroines instead of damsels in distress. In *Lanval*, a fairy queen rescues her lover from execution. In *Les Deux Amanz*, a young maiden, hoping to ensure her lover's success in a trial set up by her father, sends for a magic potion from her mysterious, powerful aunt.

Marie also offers sympathy to women who are trapped in unhappy marriages, forced to

look for love elsewhere, or have sex outside of marriage. In *Milun*, a noblewoman uses her female network to hide her illegitimate child, and protect both his reputation and her own.

Marie complains that anyone of "great renown" is bound to become the victim of jealousy, and certainly at least one of her contemporaries, Denis Piramus, was critical of her. Although he tells us that she was

"much praised", he ultimately dismisses her *lais* as frivolous fodder ("wont to please ladies") rather than serious art.

Marie refused to let such talk stop her, and we can discern her influence today in modern updates of folk tales and legends, from Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* to Karrie Fransman and Jonathan Plackett's *Gender Swapped Fairy Tales*.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROSE WILKINSON

The trailblazer who hit back at the haters

Christine de Pizan used her literary brilliance – and peerless connections – to wage a war on misogyny

Christine de Pizan (1364–c1430) was the definition of a hustler. One of the most prolific writers of the Middle Ages, with a career spanning almost four decades, her poems and books are still enjoyed today.

Christine grew up in luxury. Her father, astrologer to King Charles V of France, moved the family from Venice to France when she was just a little girl. She had a happy childhood and was pleased with the husband her father chose for her, Etienne du Castel, whom she married when she was just 15. But disaster struck when Etienne died of the plague a decade later. Finding herself the sole provider for her children, Christine refused to remarry but instead picked up a quill. In doing so, she became the first known woman in European history to make a living as a writer.

Christine was not only a talented author but also an astute businesswoman. She became expert in book production, and leveraged her networks to ensure that her writing ended up in the hands of the highest echelons of French society.

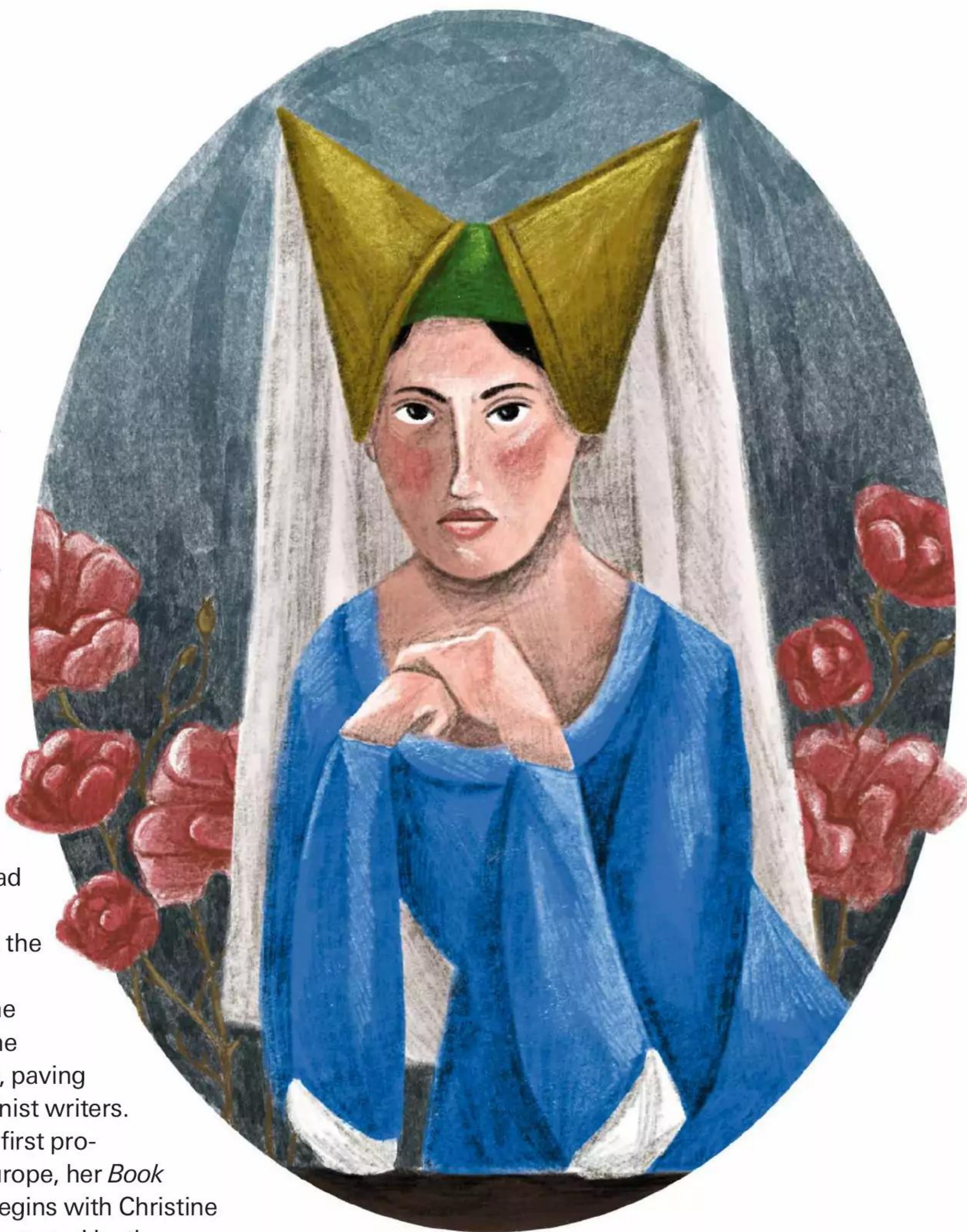
She started her career writing love poetry, but switched gears when she began to attract the attention of a wealthier audience. She wrote political treatises for princes and other nobility, including a manual on how to be the perfect knight. She strategised, often choosing to write in French, a language “more common throughout the world than any other”, so that her books didn’t become “useless and forgotten”. She was even commissioned to write a biography of the late Charles V.

With her readership secured, Christine set out to effect change. In her political works, she called for an end to

the in-fighting then plaguing the French nobility. She also devoted a poem to Joan of Arc, confident that the peasant girl would lead the French to victory against the English in the Hundred Years’ War.

Most famously, she wrote back against the misogyny of her time, paving the way for later feminist writers. Considered to be the first proto-feminist tract in Europe, her *Book of the City of Ladies* begins with Christine in her study. She is frustrated by the “pack of lies” male authors peddle about women. She falls asleep and has a dream in which she builds an allegorical city, populated by inspirational women from throughout history. She tells of Empress Nicaula, better known as the Queen of Sheba, who was “more skilled in politics, statesmanship and justice” than any king, and of Queen Hypsicratea, who dressed as a male knight to help her husband achieve victory on the battlefield.

Christine uses these heroines to rebuff the vicious stereotypes about her sex – that they nagged their husbands, and were weak, unfaithful and incapable of leadership. She presented a copy of this book to the Queen of France herself, a lavish manuscript known as *The Book of the Queen*.



She devoted a poem to Joan of Arc, confident that the peasant girl would lead the French to victory against the English



Christine de Pizan, pictured speaking to a trio of inspirational women in an illustration in her *Book of the City of Ladies*, written around the turn of the 15th century



The holy woman the church loved to hate

Not even accusations of heresy and threats of death could prevent Margery Kempe from spreading God's word

It was hard to miss Margery Kempe (c1373—after 1438). Even though she was married and had given birth to at least 14 children, she would often appear dressed all in white, a colour then reserved for virgins. She was prone to disrupting church services and local events with loud and noisy outbursts of crying, and she rebuked anyone who swore an oath within earshot. On pilgrimage, her fellow travellers, weary of her holier-than-thou

attitude, exiled her to the end of the dinner table and refused to speak to her. Some loved Margery, but still more loved to hate her.

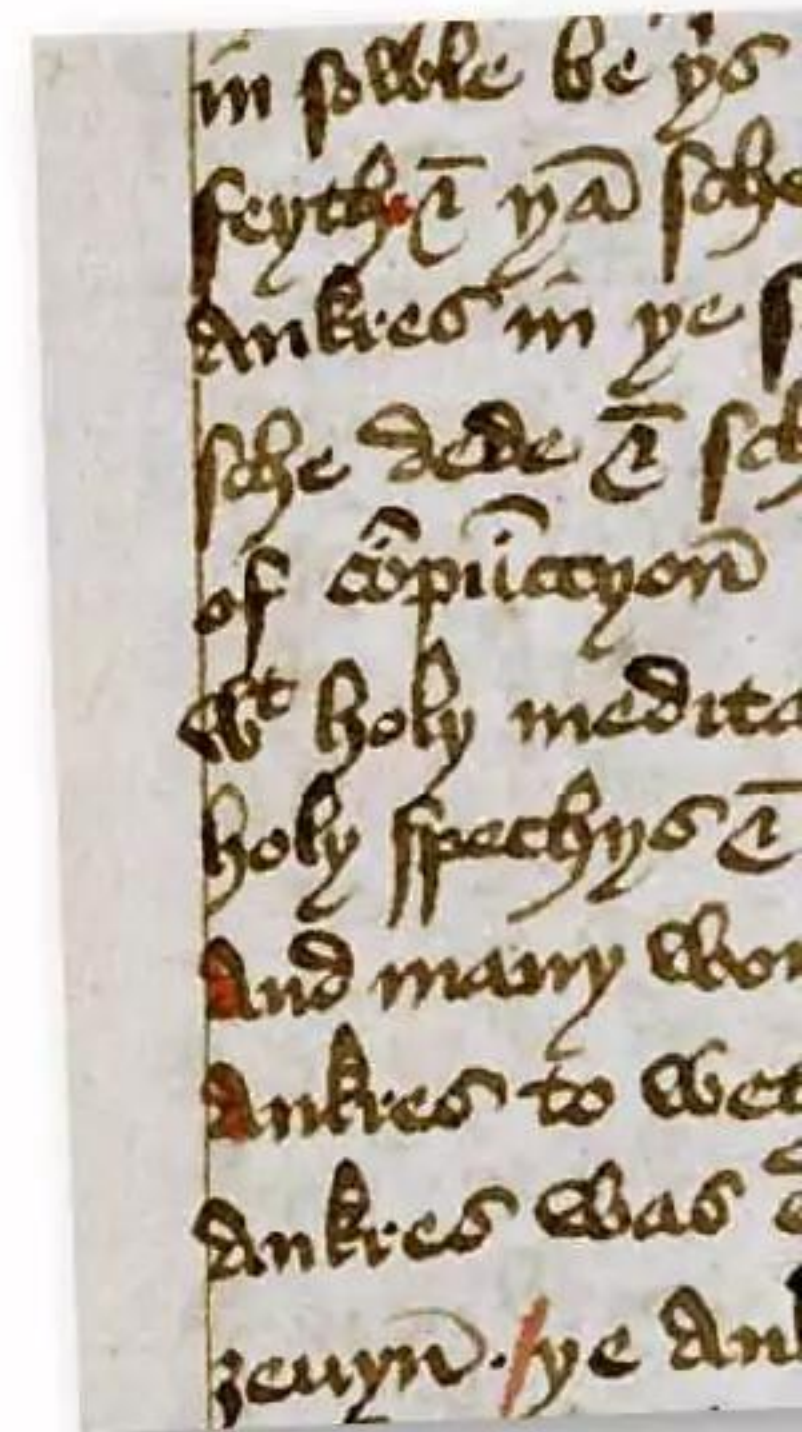
It wasn't until after she was married that Margery decided she wanted to become a holy woman. Her dictated autobiography, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, tells us that she experienced the first of many visions from God after the traumatic birth of her first child. Some years later, after a couple of failed

business attempts in milling and brewing, she converted to the religious life and travelled all around the world, meeting with other holy people and following in the footsteps of saints. She even negotiated a celibate marriage with her husband because she considered herself married to God instead.

Because she was just an ordinary woman rather than a nun or an anchoress (see opposite for more about anchoresses), some accused her of being a hypocrite and even thought her visions were sent from the devil. However, her book describes the positive influence she had on many others. A sinful woman on the point of death was "granted mercy" in the afterlife because Margery prayed for her soul. Another, tormented by visions of devils after the birth of her child, underwent a miraculous recovery when Margery paid her a visit. And in 1420, when a fire threatened her hometown, Margery's prayers helped to bring about a snow-storm to quench its flames.

Because she was an outspoken woman who made her presence known and who refused to enclose herself in a convent or anchorhold, Margery often found herself in trouble with the authorities. Christian women in medieval Europe were forbidden from preaching and Margery's readiness to talk about God, in public, led to serious accusations of heresy. She was hounded to the outskirts of Canterbury by an angry mob who claimed they had a "cartful of thorns" ready to burn her with, and she was even put on trial in front of the Archbishop of York.

Margery managed to talk her way out of execution, rightly asserting that she had never spoken from any pulpit, but her run-ins with the law remind us that women could find themselves in very real danger if they attracted the wrong attention.





The lockdown saint who speaks to the modern world

From her walled-in cell in medieval Norfolk, Julian of Norwich wrote words steeped in religious fervour that have carried down the years

When Julian of Norwich was 30 years old, in 1373, she lay in her sickbed, convinced she was going to die. Instead, something miraculous happened. The crucifix placed before her by a priest came to life, and she saw Jesus hanging on the cross, fresh blood dripping from his wounds.

This was the first of a series of visions in which God appeared to, and spoke with, Julian. After she had recovered from her illness, she felt compelled to write them down. She hoped her *Revelations* would bring comfort and inspiration to others. In her first account of these visions, known as the 'short version', Julian excuses herself as "a woman, ignorant, weak and frail", a mere messenger for the word of God. But in her second, more celebrated version, this reference to her gender has been erased.

It is possible that Julian removed mention of her sex because she feared she would be accused of heresy. Few women were writing religious texts and those who did often found themselves under serious scrutiny. However, the fact that the 'long version' was written after Julian became an anchoress raises another possibility.

Anchritism was one of the most esteemed vocations of the Christian church available to a woman. A would-be anchoress had to petition the church, and they needed to have enough money to support themselves for the rest of their lives. If their petition was accepted, they would have the funeral rites read over them by a priest before being imprisoned in a small room (or series of rooms) called a 'cell', usually adjoined to a church. Here they would pray, fast, reflect on God and live out the rest of their days. We don't know what happened to Julian after she

died, but many other anchoresses were destined never to leave their cells, their bodies being buried in the dirt beneath.

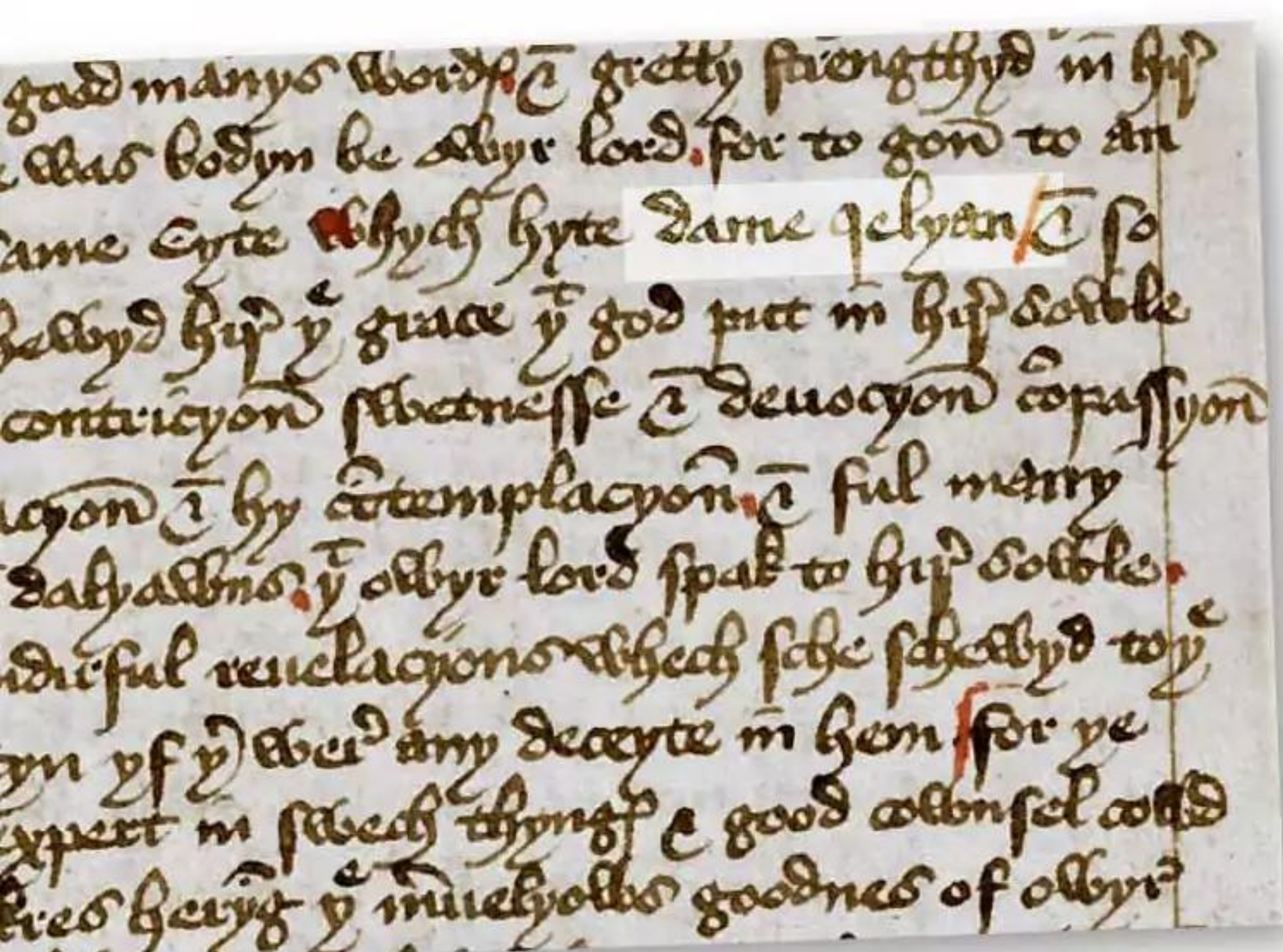
People came from far and wide to seek the blessing of an anchoress. We know from Margery Kempe's *Book* that she went to meet Julian and to ask for her advice. After listening to Margery's account of her visions, Julian told her to trust God and not to fear "the talk of the world" because, the more slander Margery experienced in life, the more reward she would receive in heaven. This encounter suggests that Julian was a renowned holy woman. Perhaps her reputation as an anchoress gave her the confidence to remove some of the caveats from her *Revelations*?

As far as we know, no one read Julian's *Revelations* in her own time, but it has been rediscovered and is beloved by many readers today. Hailed as the 'lockdown saint' during the Covid-19 pandemic, she is remembered with a sculpture at Norwich Cathedral. Ironically, her internment gave her the time, space and freedom required to create one of the most moving and poetical texts of the Middle Ages. She hoped her *Revelations*, which characterise God as kind, gentle and motherly, would bring comfort and inspiration to others. Thanks to the love of God, she reminds us, "all shall be well", no matter how much suffering we experience on earth.

The lives of Marie, Christine, Margery and Julian reveal that, despite the challenges they faced, ordinary women could – and did – influence the world around them in the Middle Ages. Julian might have asked her readers to "forget" her name and think only of God. But by committing her experience to paper (or, rather, parchment), she ensured that she would be remembered centuries later. **E**

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Hetta Howes is a senior lecturer in medieval literature at City, University of London. Her new book is *Poet, Mystic, Widow, Wife: The Extraordinary Lives of Medieval Women* (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2024)

We don't know what happened to Julian, but many anchoresses never left their cells, their bodies buried in the dirt beneath



A section from Margery Kempe's *Book* in which she recounts seeking advice from "dame jelyan" (Julian of Norwich) while the latter woman was living in a cell as an anchoress

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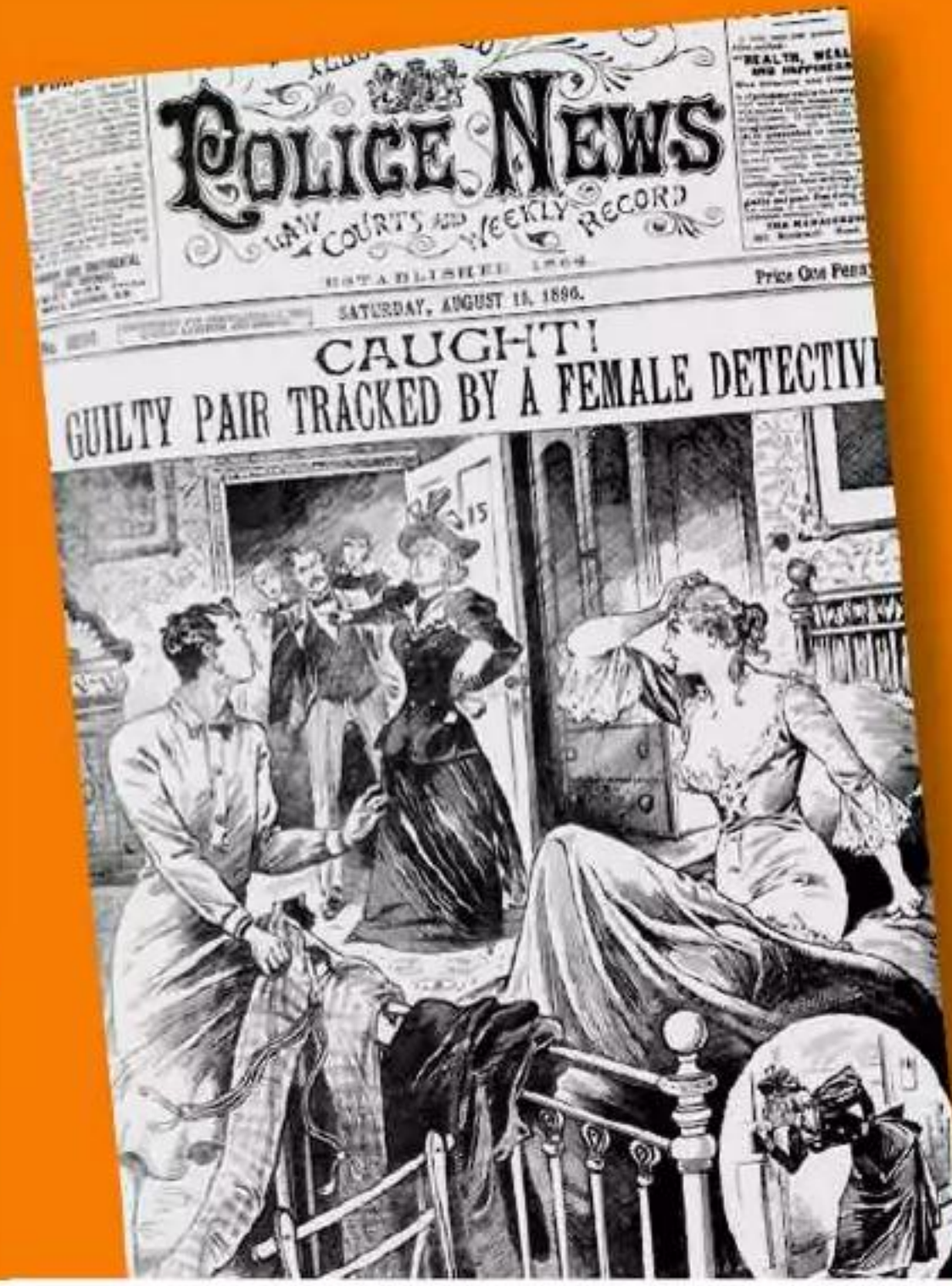
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BOOKS

CRIME

“Female detectives often worked to the detriment of other women”

Rebecca Rideal is enthralled by a fresh look at the roles played by women in 19th-century crime detection > page 78



ECONOMICS

// At the book's heart are characters, often colourful, who used and created the various forms of money to support commerce, trade and livelihoods //

Linda Yueh recommends a book exploring the history of money and how it has affected our lives > page 79

WWII

“Allied bombing caused more damage and more casualties in Naples than did the Germans”

Peter Caddick-Adams on a powerful account of the south Italian city in wartime > page 76

ASIA

“Kublai Khan's life is a remarkable and sobering tale of turmoil, change and upheaval”

Nicholas Morton lauds a new look at the Mongol leader's conquest of China > page 77

INTERVIEW

Annie Gray on the evolution of the British high street, from markets to malls > page 70



INTERVIEW / ANNIE GRAY

“Leisure was very much built into the whole shopping experience”

ANNIE GRAY tells Ellie Cawthorne how the evolution of the high street has been a story of growth, specialisation and diversification – but also of entertainment and enduring appeal

Ellie Cawthorne: What can looking at a high street in any given era tell us about that period?

Annie Gray: So much. If you walk down any high street, you'll see the things that people want and need on an everyday basis. So if you were strolling down a high street in, say, 1903, you'd have saddlers and leather workers, and specialist shops selling pork and different meats. You'd see a lot of shops selling cloth, because ready-to-wear clothing wasn't around then. And you'd encounter lots of items that we simply don't have a role for in our lives today – tiny little bits of ironmongery and things like that.

Alongside the quotidian stuff, high streets have always been relatively prestigious areas for leisure shopping, featuring the likes of jewellers, swordsmiths, clockmakers and lace merchants. Luxury goods such as these are often imports, so they can tell you a lot about Britain's place in a global context.

Take tea for example: it was first sold in china shops, then in high-end grocers, then – as it became cheaper – everywhere. Just following the journey of tea reveals so much about the way in which people interacted with the global landscape of commercialisation.

When did a cluster of shops that we might recognise as a high street first appear in British towns?

The evolution of the high street was a really gradual process. The market was still the most important place to shop – certainly for the working classes – well into the 20th century. Market day was always the busiest day in town. But between 1650 and 1750, most towns in Britain begin to have some fixed shops, usually around or leading from the market. One of the first types of shop to move into fixed premises was the butcher. That kept mess away from the main shopping area, and enabled butchers to lock up stock and install cold stores.

Traditionally, the market square was also a gathering place – somewhere people went to enjoy entertainment, to jeer at criminals in the stocks or to hear political proclamations. Slowly, these aspects became features of the high street, too. It was where you'd find sex workers, beggars, people ranting on street corners, hustlers drumming up custom for the bear fight being held the next day – that kind of thing. In my book, I argue

that the high street isn't just about shops. It's a place for the community to come together.

What items have been enduring staples of the high street?

The most significant products sold there have been clothing and food, but the ways those things are sold have changed hugely. In 1700, a typical grocer would offer raisins, dried ginger and spices, but it would also sell you a couple of nails and maybe a bit of cloth as well. Gradually, though, shops became more and more specialised.

In the 19th century, high-end grocers emerged calling themselves 'Italian warehouses'. They sold Italian products such as olive oil and jars of preserves, but also the name just sounded more exotic. Then, in the second half of the 19th century, chain grocers such as Lipton's, the Maypole Dairy and Home & Colonial were established to serve the lower end of the market. When the first Sainsbury's shop opened in Drury Lane, London in 1869, it sold only eggs, milk and butter. There was a lot of money to be made in these early chain grocers, many of which sold just a small range of products.

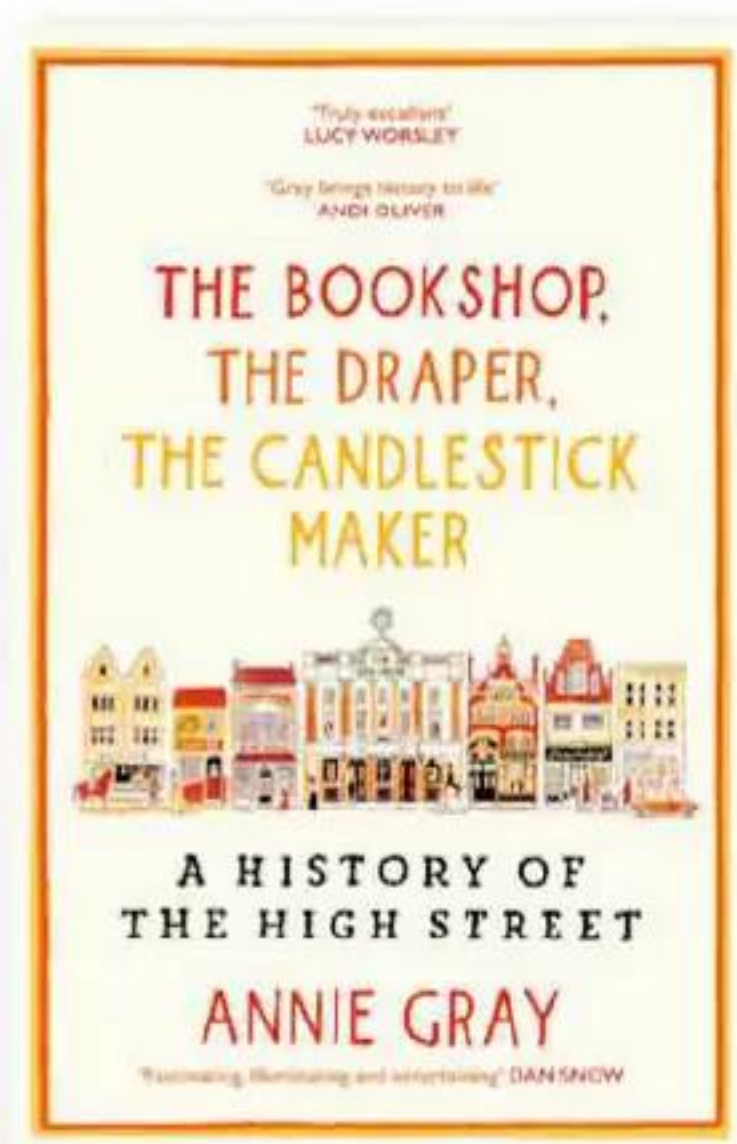
By the postwar period, multiple chain grocers were operating, including Sainsbury's, Tesco and Waitrose, all expanding their offering on high streets. Then Britain saw the rise of the out-of-town supermarket – which is modelled on the market, only supersized – and the start of a move away from food shopping on the high street.

What are some of the most interesting high street shops now lost to time?

The fabric shop is a fascinating example of something that has all but disappeared. The story of clothing on the high street began with the sale of cloth, then cut cloth, then almost ready-to-wear – then, finally, truly ready-to-wear clothing. That final step didn't really happen until the 20th century. Even when I was growing up in the 1980s, there was a popular chain of fabric shops called Gordon Thoday; I remember my mum spending hours in one. Just within my lifetime, fabric shops have virtually vanished from the high street, apart from some very small independent outlets. I think that if you told someone from 160 years ago, or even 60 years ago, that today we all buy off-the-peg clothes in randomly assigned sizes, they would have been flabbergasted.

There was also a level of real specialism on the high street that I think we've now lost. You might have a lawnmower shop next door to a piano shop next to the oil man, who sold oil paints and different types of oils for cooking or fuel. It's very rare to find really specialist shops anymore, especially given modern rent pressures.

That said, one of the success stories of the past few years is the bookshop. Booksellers have always been prevalent, and in the early



The Bookshop, The Draper, The Candlestick Maker: A History of the High Street

by Annie Gray
(Profile Books,
416 pages, £22)



PROFILE

Annie Gray is a historian, cook, broadcaster and writer specialising in the history of food and dining in Britain since around 1600. Her previous books include *At Christmas We Feast* (Profile Books, 2021)

PHOTOGRAPH BY
MELISSA RODRIGUES

days of the high street they were a mark of a well-appointed town. People would stroll past to look at the prints in the window, each one displayed in its own pane of glass.

In the past, booksellers were usually printers, too. Inside you could tell them which book or collection of poems or sermons you'd like, and then you would choose your own binding. Some booksellers would also operate as circulating libraries. These were quite relaxed, exclusive spaces where you could sit and browse. Leisure was very much built into the whole experience, and bookshops embraced the idea of shopping as a pleasure to really lean into.

When did shopping become seen as a leisure activity rather than just another chore?

It always has been, to some extent. Even before the 17th century, if you were wealthy you would delegate the task of going to the market, but you might still go along to a selling fair. A lot of those still exist in a changed form: think of the Goose Fair in Nottingham, or the Midsummer Fair in Cambridge. Today these are big entertainment events with rollercoasters and candyfloss, but when founded they were international selling fairs. They would last up to a week, and you would spend a lot of time discussing possible purchases, which would be brought out and spread before you to inspect. You might even have salespeople come to your home.

The idea that you would go out to spend a day just having fun shopping in town really took off in the late 17th and early 18th century – and it caused a lot of concern at the time. Many people hated the idea of browsing – a notion that, unsurprisingly, was widely associated with women. Quite clearly, men were just as guilty, but women were the ones who took the flack. It was known as 'tumbling', in reference to women who would grab at bolts of cloth, tumbling the fabric all over the place without buying anything.

Shopping was seen as a game into which you entered with whoever was selling. Most places didn't have fixed prices until the mid-18th century, so you needed to bargain. Trying to get a good price – to get the better of the shopkeeper, as it were – was treated as a kind of intellectual exercise.

Napoleon supposedly called Britain a "nation of shopkeepers". How have shopkeepers been regarded over time?

For much of history, shopkeepers were not regarded as society's most upstanding members. If you go back to the medieval period, there was a really strong idea that you should shop directly from the producer, often a farmer – which all sounds very idyllic and organic and local. But, even back then, that idea was utter rubbish. Even in the Middle Ages, there were people buying stuff from producers, then selling it on. Such on-sellers were widely hated, considered immoral and profiteering.

Gradually, though, people began to realise that producers aren't necessarily very good at selling, and that maybe people who are really good at making cheese should just make really good cheese, while a specialised salesperson, perhaps with a network of agents, should sell that cheese. People came to appreciate that, though there might be a

// One store had a Swedish diver plunge from the mezzanine into a pool five storeys below – only for her to lose her swimming costume on the way down //

bit of profit in on-selling, those profits ultimately find their way into the system, so it's quite good for the economy overall.

What can you tell us about the rise of the department store?

The concept is not actually very old. It was only from the 1860s onwards that the 'Big Shop' – a brilliantly descriptive term – emerged on the high street. Such establishments weren't called 'department stores' at the time; when that term did start to be used, it was a pejorative Americanism for something that was seen as a bit shabby and downmarket.

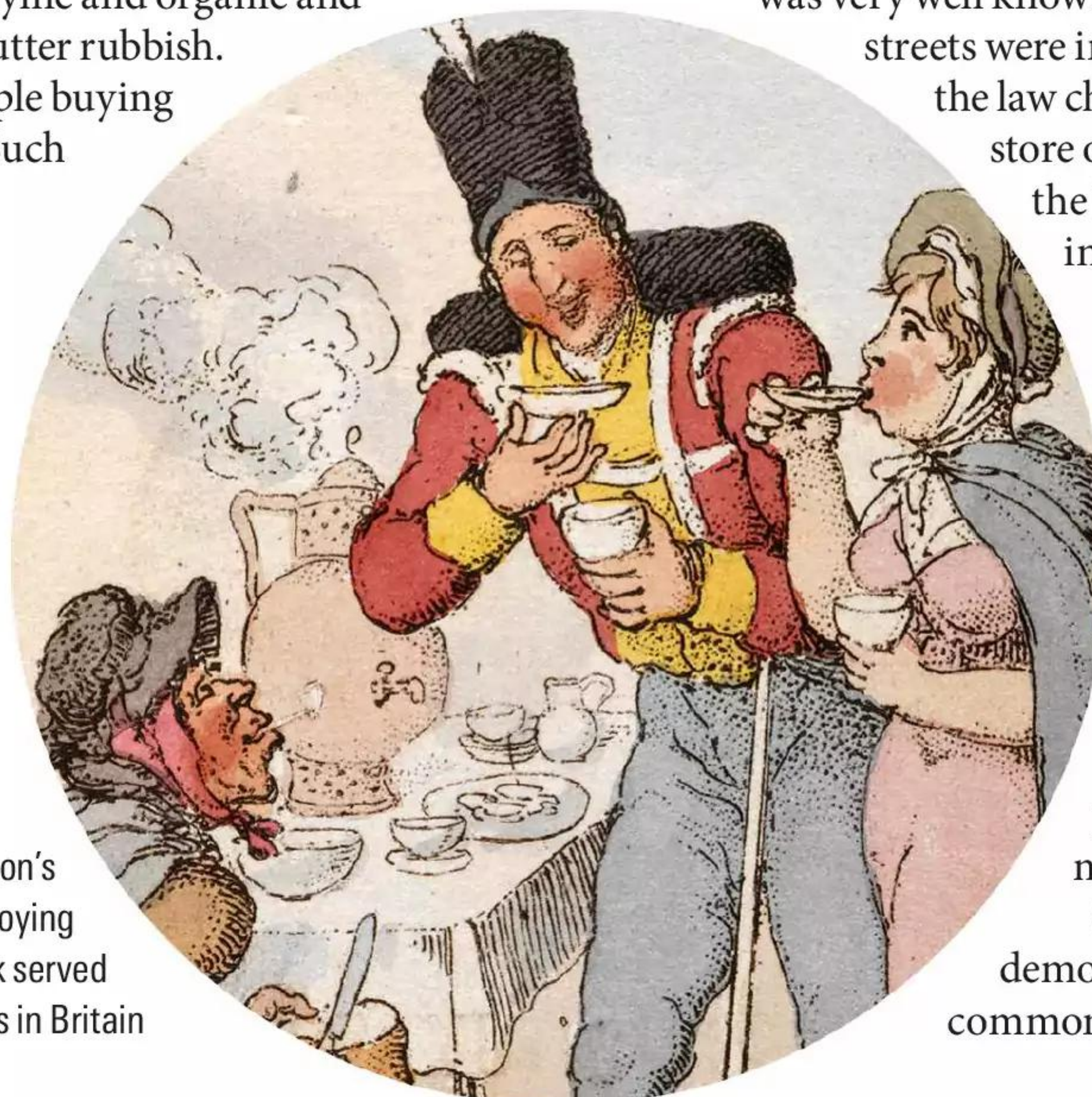
A lot of the early Big Shops evolved out of other, more specialist shops that just started selling additional items. For example, mercers originally sold only silk, but then many mercers became drapers, then the drapers also started to sell furniture, then carpets and clothes and homewares. They might move into ready-to-wear, and add some toys, and perhaps an entire house-fitting service. Then, before you knew it, you had yourself a Big Shop.

A lot of the early Big Shops extended into adjacent premises, ending up with a real mishmash of buildings. When department stores became established, though, they often sported glorious, usually neoclassical frontages that you could spot a mile away: think big columns, huge atriums with multiple floors, and massive windows. Many department stores also had staff quarters on the top floor, because the shop assistants would live in.

The idea of the window display was really driven by department stores. Selfridges displayed a monoplane, and Lewis's of Liverpool placed a hand excavated from Pompeii in its window. Another innovative sales technique introduced by department stores was the big marketing stunt. Gordon Selfridge – very brash, very American – was very well known for this. He thought British high streets were incredibly backward, and even had the law changed in order to build his massive store on Oxford Street. But the golden age of the big department store stunt was the interwar period.

Bentalls in Kingston upon Thames was great at such affairs. When the first Hoover was launched, a giant Hoover was installed in its atrium. On another occasion, it had a Swedish diver called Anita Kittner plunge from the mezzanine into a tiny swimming pool five storeys below. The floor had to be reinforced because of the velocity with which she hit that pool. Alarming, she lost her swimming costume on the way down.

Other stores would hold cookery demonstrations, and catwalk shows were common right up until the 1970s. It was all about



Down the hatch Thomas Rowlandson's early 19th-century depiction of people enjoying hot saloop, which was once a popular drink served on street corners in Britain



More food for thought You can hear an extended version of this interview on our podcast soon: historyextra.com/high-street-pod



End of the road? A confectionery shop and livery stables just off Putney high street, 1897. Since the 19th century, people have fretted about small-scale grocers being forced out of business by 'Big Shops'. "That took a lot longer than people at the time thought it would," says Annie Gray. "But it has undeniably happened"

bringing people in through the door, making the department store a hub for more than just shopping.

What refreshments were on offer for hungry shoppers?

As they are today, refreshments have always been a huge part of the high-street experience. In the modern context, I'm not fond of a chain cafe, but it's important to acknowledge that early examples were crucial to the development of the high street.

Take Lockhart's Cocoa Rooms. Cocoa was traditionally associated with institutional living – workhouses, hospitals – and Lockhart's was squarely aimed at the poor. You could bring your own food, and sit in one all day. So I think they deserve an honourable mention, though I wouldn't necessarily want to go and spend all day there, sipping cocoa and eating a sausage.

Some street-seller offerings from the past are really interesting, too – things such as saloop. Very few people in Britain today have heard of saloop, but it's still a popular drink in the Middle East [where it's now commonly called salep]. Made from powdered orchid root, it's a pick-me-up that was frequently served on street corners in 18th-century Britain. So I think a mug of saloop would have been worth stopping for.

What debates about high streets have raged over the centuries?

People have always been concerned about the high street. First of all, they were worried that shopping was immoral, and that everyone would waste their hard-earned money. Then, when shops became more established and we all realised that we loved them, concerns

shifted to the issue of small shopkeepers being driven out of business by Big Shops. People have been arguing over that since at least the 1850s. In the early 20th century, the debate focused on the 'death of the grocer' – the idea that small-scale specialist grocers would be forced under by Big Shops with food halls and unskilled workers. That took a lot longer than people at the time thought it would, but it has undeniably happened.

The class aspect – whether a high street is being gentrified or is in slow decline – has long been a topic of debate. Ethically, too, there are many choices to make when shopping, because another argument that has raged forever concerns the treatment of producers. There was a huge boycott of slave-produced sugar from the late 18th century, while in the 1890s people were concerned about dressmakers being worked to the bone. We still have debates today about working conditions and modern slavery in terms of how our products are made.

Many people have talked about the 'death of the high street'.

Should we be worried?

I think we should bear in mind the idea of 'use it or lose it', but actually I believe there's more hand-wringing than there needs to be. So long as we still have a community hub, it might not be such a bad thing if the high street constricts. I do think, though, that we would definitely lose something if our high streets disappeared entirely – and modern surveys reveal that 98 per cent of the population agrees with me.

We can't turn back the clock, but even though we've got fewer shops now, history shows us that all previous predictions about the disappearance of the high street have been confounded. **E**



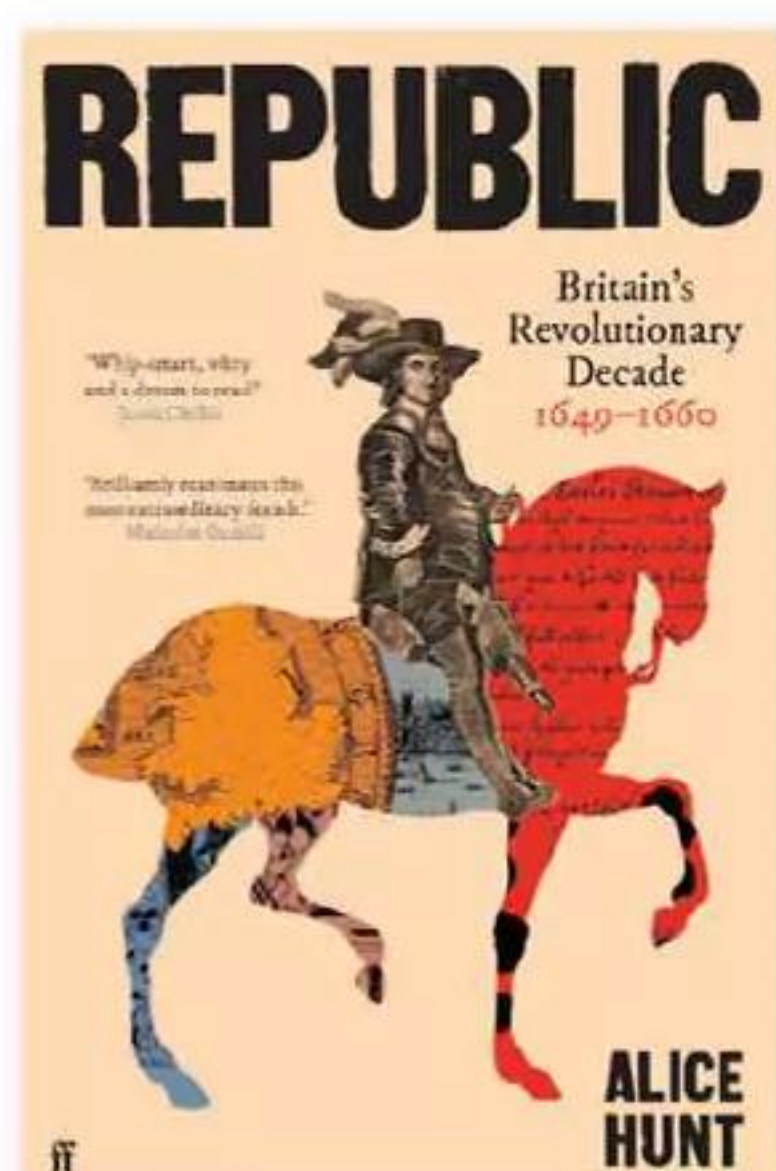
Fatal approach

A 1702 print shows Quaker leader James Nayler entering Bristol in 1656, in imitation of Christ. His trial by parliament and brutal punishment for blasphemy are expertly covered in a new book

COMMONWEALTH

Years without kings

JOHN MORRILL is intermittently impressed by a selection of highlights from a pivotal political interlude in British and Irish history



Republic: Britain's Revolutionary Decade, 1649-1660

by Alice Hunt

Faber & Faber, 512 pages, £25

For many years, books devoted to Britain's decade without a monarch were as rare as hen's teeth. New biographies of Cromwell appeared almost every year, of course, as did books on the causes and course of the Civil War of the 1640s. And though there were monographs on key moments in the 1650s, there were many lacunae – a lack of books

on the army, on the state church, on the parliaments, on the law courts and on what happened in Scotland, for example.

Most of those gaps have now been filled, so surveys are less intimidating to write, and there has lately been a rush of titles. Alice Hunt's is a very good read – but it is not one for those who want to acquaint themselves for the first time with the shape of the decade.

It is certainly a beautifully presented book. Instead of the regulation groupings of over-familiar portraits, each chapter begins with a defining image – mostly woodcuts or engravings, several unfamiliar – that serves as a motto for the chapter, together with one or two extracts from key writings linked to the themes, which is very effective.

The book is well edited and has extensive endnotes, with a bibliography and index taking up a quarter of the total text. Hunt writes attractively and with good pace. She seems to have read less widely than, say, Anna Keay (whose 2022 work *The Restless Republic* remains most highly recommended), but enough for most purposes. She made the interesting decision to devote a chapter to each calendar year, so some stories that span more than one (Cromwell's Irish campaigns, the first protectorate parliament, the major generals) get choked off mid-story. It allows each chapter to cover a range of themes but, oddly, hinders a sense of chronological flow.

Each chapter is essentially a series of attractive tableaux. Hunt has an excellent

// The paradox was that being king would have limited, not increased, Cromwell's power //

visual sense, describing the physical environments in which events occurred – demonstrated best in depictions of Cromwell's first and second inauguration as lord protector, or of his funeral procession.

She is a literature scholar, and her sections on key works of the decade (Milton's polemical works, Davenant's operas) are well managed. Sometimes, though, there are digressions: for example, Bunyan appears en passant, accompanied by a section on *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which did not appear until many years later, the first part being published in 1678. Conversely, an excellent account of Andrew Marvell's time with Sir Thomas Fairfax and his family allows us to see the complexities of both of their positions. There's also a superb account of the children of the Earl of Cork (Richard, Roger, Robert and their feisty sister Katherine, Lady Ranelagh), all of whom were great survivors, working as well with Charles II as with Oliver Cromwell.

A qualified success

There are no new revelations in this book, which is content to tell familiar stories with verve and intelligence. It does, though feature a number of notable achievements. It excels in its treatment of the first half of Cromwell's Irish campaign – the important part, incorporating his sack of Drogheda and Wexford – but barely covers the second half, including the equally terrible (this time for him) siege of Clonmel. The Scottish campaigns are also well covered, as is the downfall of the rump parliament.

Another success is the section on the early days of the protectorate, especially those on the creation of Cromwell's court and household in Whitehall and Hampton Court, the parliamentary 'trial' and mutilation of the Quaker James Nayler, and the debates in 1657 as Cromwell resisted pressure to become king. Also commendable is the part on the rise and fall of Richard Cromwell, who is treated more sympathetically than in most studies.

Hunt discusses the royalists effectively, if intermittently. The decision to include evocative moments in the lives of secondary figures, and to give space to literary texts (such as Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler*) adds further appeal, but does – together with other digressions – perhaps result in central themes being neglected or skimmed on.

Readers are told nothing about the elections of 1654, 1656 or 1658–59, for example, or about the purges and exclusions of 1654 and 1656, and precious little about the legislative achievements of 1653 or 1657. The various constitutional proposals are not adequately described, and discussion of the nature and extent of religious toleration is woolly and not very good. Scotland and Ireland are largely forgotten, except when Cromwell is in the process of conquering them.

In conclusion, this book is a qualified success. When it is good, it is very good – but some of the author's choices undermine claims that this is a comprehensive guide to the period. These include a failure to explore the constitutional outrage of the Decimation Tax (which funded the major generals), the imprisonment of the defence counsel and enforced resignation of the judge for their defiance of the government in the case of English merchant George Cony, and the nature of Cromwell's relations with the Council of State. Those omissions aren't merely disappointing in themselves; all three areas provide vital background to the kingship debates of 1657, and the paradox that being king would have limited, not increased, Cromwell's power.

Finally, there are an uncomfortable number of factual errors. Cromwell, not Bradshaw, was the first president of the rump's Council of State. Cromwell did not head for Limerick after Drogheda. Prince Henry and Princess Henrietta were not seven and two years old, respectively, in 1649 but eight and four. Phelim O'Neill, leader of the Irish rebels, was not rich and powerful when he launched his attempted coup, but destitute and desperate.

Most of these errors do not affect the argument, but a small number do, including a misrepresentation of Cromwell's *Declaration... for the Undeceiving of Deluded and Seduced People* (1650), which is just that – a bitter and vicious anti-clerical rant to detach the people from false leaders. He did not see Irish Catholics as part of the Anti-christ, but he did think their bishops were.

In short, read this book for pleasure – but be aware of its limitations. **H**

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John Morrill is professor emeritus in British and Irish history at the University of Cambridge

ON THE PODCAST

A disruptive decade

Content producer **Danny Bird** picks three episodes of the *HistoryExtra* podcast related to Britain's republican era

Cromwell's Britain



The period between Charles I's execution in 1649 and the Restoration of the monarchy 11 years later was dominated by one man: Oliver Cromwell. In a 2023 instalment of our

Everything You Wanted to Know series, historian Ronald Hutton answers listener questions and popular search queries on the man and his period of rule.
historyextra.com/cromwell-life-pod

Chaotic times



The brief experiment with republicanism was both a cause and effect of one of the most turbulent centuries in British history. In a podcast episode from 2023, Dr Jonathan Healey

discusses the events of the 17th century, an era radicalised by civil war, a coup d'état, regicide and witch hunts – a revolutionary century that forged modern Britain.

historyextra.com/people-power-pod

Return of the king



Little over a decade after beheading one king, Britain and Ireland found themselves once more under the rule of a monarch. In 1660, parliamentarians chose to abandon their

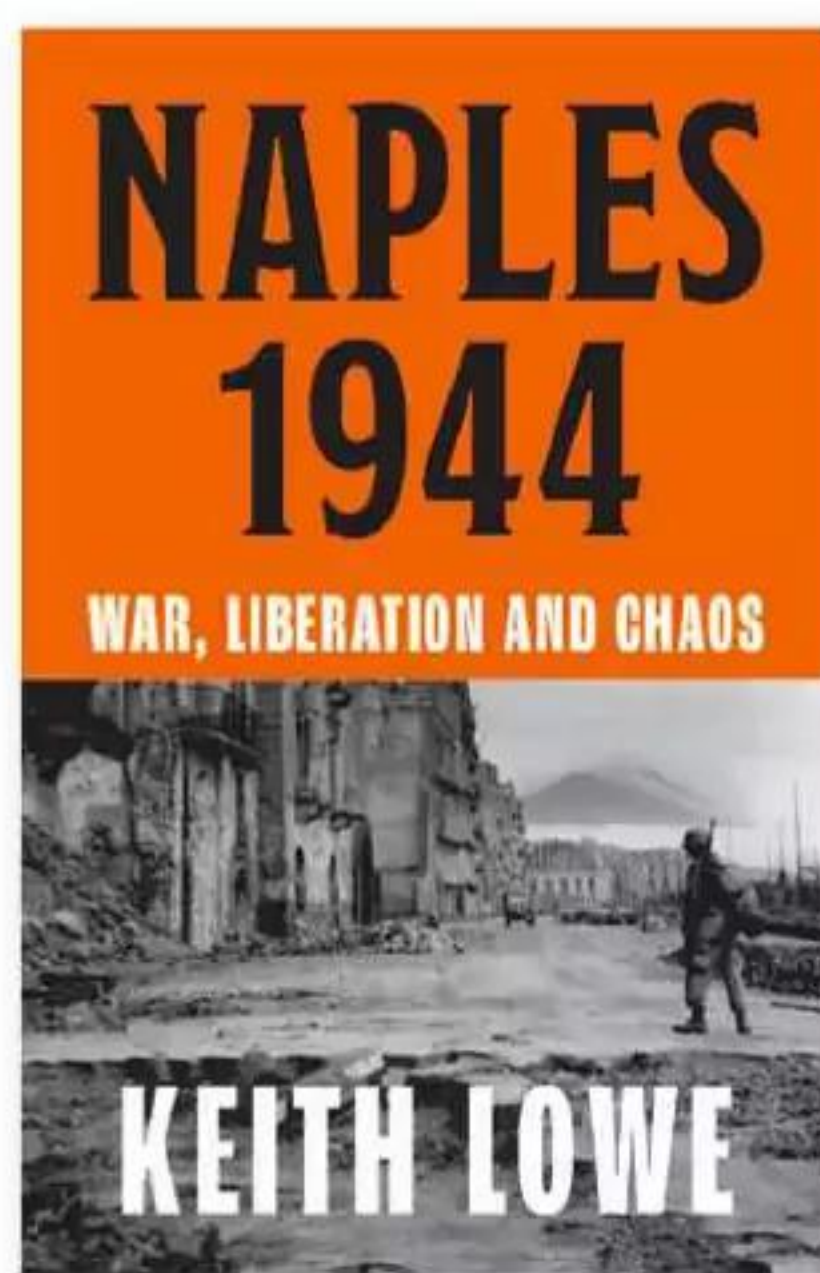
republic and invite the exiled Charles II to take the vacant throne. Dr Clare Jackson answers listener questions about this extraordinary volte-face in an episode from 2022.

historyextra.com/restoration-pod

WWII

Devastation and defiance

PETER CADDICK-ADAMS applauds a detailed, human-focused and expertly researched account of southern Italy's biggest city in wartime



Naples 1944: War, Liberation and Chaos
by Keith Lowe
William Collins, 400 pages,
£25

Having been impressed with the research behind Keith Lowe's *Inferno: The Fiery Destruction of*

Hamburg, 1943 (2007), I was happy to reconnect with his deft scholarship in this latest work. Here again he leads us away from front-line military history to explore the effects of war on the civilian inhabitants of a large city.

The title echoes *Naples '44* (1978) by army intelligence officer Norman Lewis. Another shadow is Curzio Malaparte's autobiographical novel of 1949, *The Skin (La Pelle)*. Some of Spike Milligan's war memoirs are set here and, having been stationed in the vicinity, Joseph Heller's 1961 anti-war novel *Catch-22* was also influenced by Naples.

This incisive tome is really three studies rolled into one. The first part provides a tour of a wartime Naples crippled by the apocalyptic four horsemen. Besides pestilence, civil war, famine and death, we witness the injurious effects of prostitution and corruption, abuse of the city's womenfolk by both Axis and Allies, and the inept antics of the Allied military government following US General Mark Clark's landings at Salerno on 9 September 1943.

The meat of the study – and, I suspect, the origin of the book (which makes me wonder why the title is *Naples 1944*) – is in the second part, covering the little-known four-day uprising of 28 September–1 October 1943 that rid the city of its German occupiers. This is a meticulous description of the first widespread rebellion against Nazi rule (other than in ghettos) anywhere in occupied Europe. It forced out the Wehrmacht – but at a cost of 1,600 inhabitants murdered, 20,000 carted off to the Reich as slave labourers, and 600 partisans killed in the city's ultimately successful bid for freedom. As Lowe observes, his is the first non-Italian study of the insurrection, in which 4,400 Neapolitans took part, including 390 *scugnizzi* – underaged street urchins.



Allied advance Fifth Army troops traverse piles of rubble in Naples in 1943, after Allied forces had taken the city following the expulsion of Nazi German occupiers

// The Germans embarked on an orgy of military and cultural sabotage but were defeated by a motley crew of poorly armed citizens //

The Germans, who were in the process of departing anyway, embarked on an orgy of military and cultural sabotage, but were defeated by a motley crew of poorly armed citizens. Echoing *The Four Days of Naples* – an Italian film of 1962 about this rebellion – Lowe observes that it was as much a revolt against 21 years of Fascism; that the rebels had far better leaders than the senior Italian officers, who bungled the 9 September transition of power; and that Allied bombing caused more damage and more casualties than did the Germans. Along the way, he muses on the irony of the Allied aerial bombing of Pompeii – that exhibits and human remains that had survived

the eruption of AD 79 were destroyed by the 'good guys' (yes, us) in 1943.

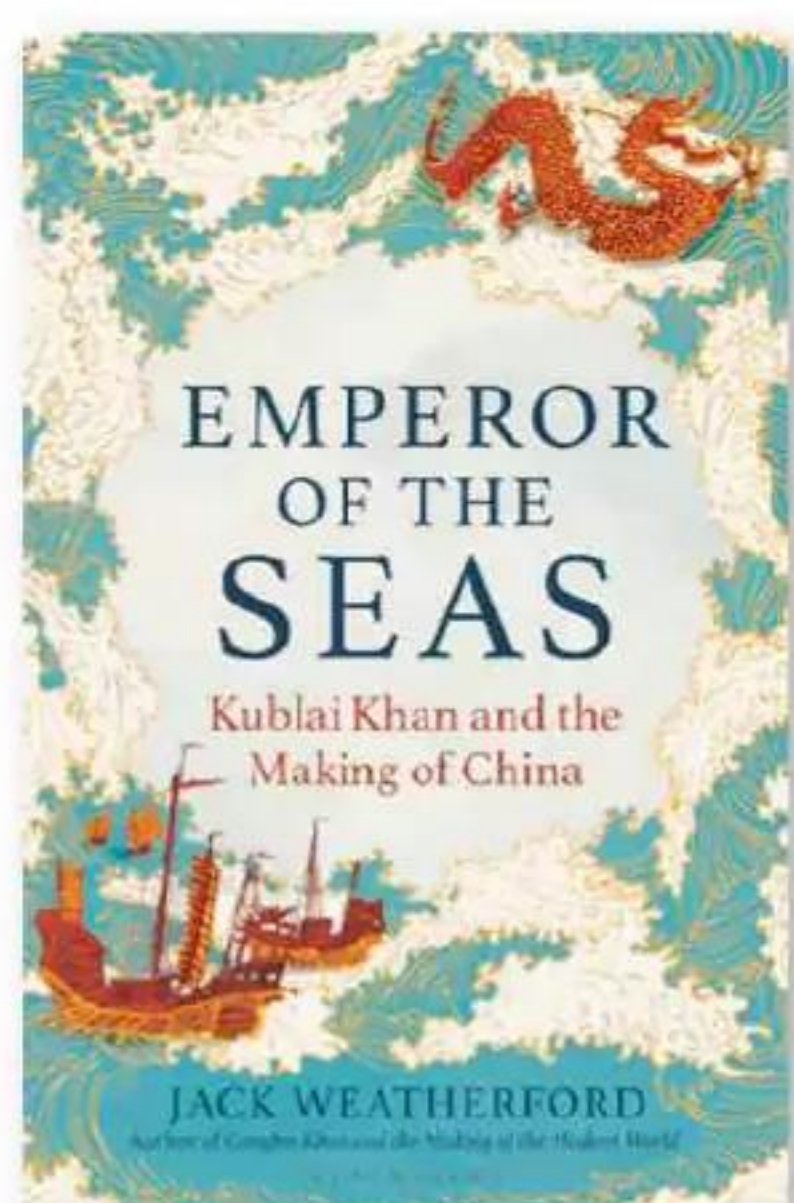
The third and final part of Lowe's book notes that on 18 March 1944, in the middle of the attritional Italian campaign at Cassino, Vesuvius erupted, necessitating a humanitarian relief operation – which the Allies for once proved adept at managing. It then goes on to explore how the history of Naples during the war has been interpreted via different post-war monarchist and communist extremes, from romantic myth-making to suppression of casualty figures and denials of corruption.

As with *Inferno*, Lowe pulls no punches in allotting blame where appropriate. At different times, all sides – the Italians, Germans and the Allies – are recipients of his tongue-lashing. Aside from the absence of a much-needed bibliography to accompany his extensive notes, we are left with a masterfully balanced narrative of the human side of an inhuman story. Ultimately, Lowe has produced an epic account of occupation, devastation and survival. **H**

Peter Caddick-Adams is a historian, writer and broadcaster. His latest book is *Winston Churchill* (Swift Press, 2024)

Oceanic ambition

NICHOLAS MORTON is swept along by a dramatic retelling of the life of the Mongol leader who came to rule China



Emperor of the Seas: Kublai Khan and the Making of China

by Jack Weatherford
Bloomsbury Continuum,
368 pages, £25

On 19 March 1279, the Song dynasty came to an end in the waters off

Yashan, 12 miles south of Macau. Its empire in southern China was already lost, but on that day the fleet bearing its last emperor, accompanied by his most determined supporters, rallied for a final stand. The result was a violent clash marked by fire, explosions and mass suicides; the seven-year old emperor died during the battle, as did his pet parrot. In later years, loyalists nurtured the dream of restoring Song China, yet that day never came.

The victor in this conflict was Kublai Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan, whose overthrow of Song China replicated a painful scene familiar to so many empires across Eurasia: downfall in the face of Mongol invasion. At its height, the Mongol empire stretched from the Pacific coast to the Mediterranean, and the citizens of Song China – like so many communities – found themselves contemplating a new future under Mongol rule.

Jack Weatherford's new book vividly recreates the dramatic and tragic events of this time. Set against the persistent rumble of war and dynastic politics, it traces Kublai's early years, when he seemed an unlikely candidate for great power, and follows his career through a relentless churn of war and politics until finally he became ruler of China. A man forever torn between his own Mongol culture and that of the lands he conquered, Kublai's life is a remarkable and sobering tale of turmoil, change and upheaval. It is also a story – as Weatherford is at pains to stress – that is inextricably linked to the sea.

The Mongols are famous for their cavalry and their great wagon cities, not for their fleets, yet the desire to conquer China compelled Kublai to grapple with the need to dominate China's great rivers and, later, the high seas. These were unfamiliar challenges

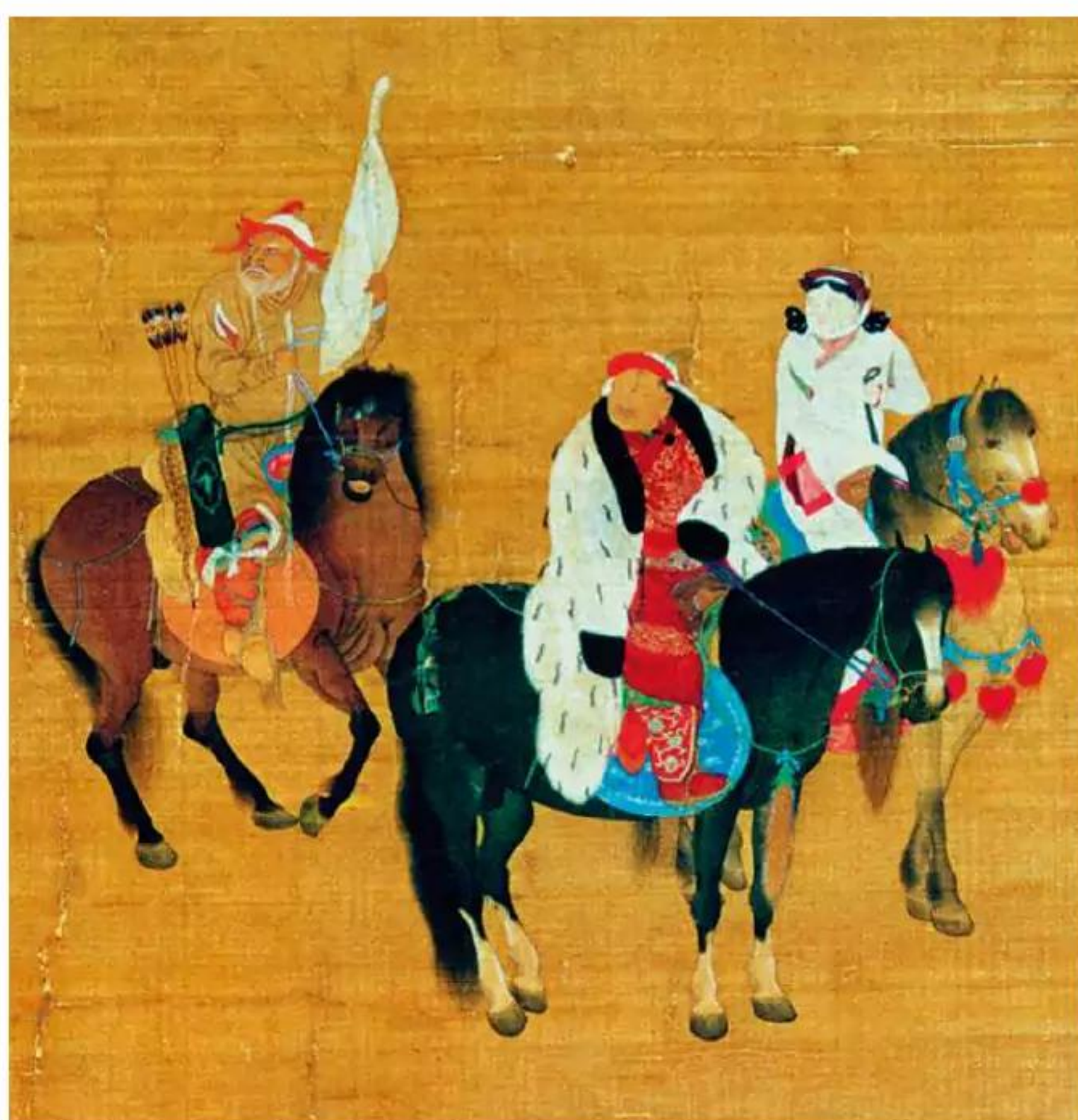
for a leader from the grass seas of central Asia, and it is fascinating to see how Kublai and his advisors tackled this imperative, both practically and conceptually. In time, the Mongol fleet expanded to number hundreds of ships and, though it failed to conquer Japan, it succeeded in hunting down the last Song emperor. Soon Kublai Khan turned his attention from war to commerce and, by the late 13th century, his vast fleets traversed the Indian Ocean and south-east Asia, creating a network of political and mercantile interests.

The dynamo of unfolding events makes for a dramatic tale, yet Weatherford's attention to detail also captures the imagination. He shares evocative asides on matters as diverse as restaurant culture, paper money, maritime innovation and the development of inoculations against smallpox.

The final chapters bring the history up to date, rapidly moving through China's engagement with the wider world in later centuries up to the present day, and closing by asking: what will the next chapter in China's history bring?

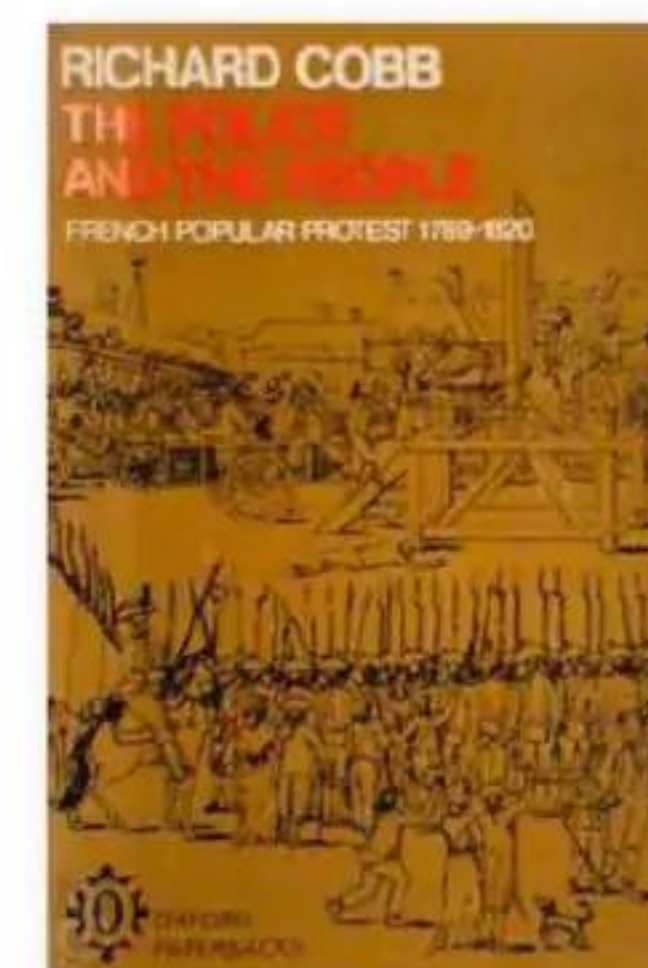
Emperor of the Seas sparkles with energy, insight and passion. I didn't see eye-to-eye with Weatherford on all points but, nonetheless, I must confess that his book was very difficult to put down. **H**

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Nicholas Morton is associate professor of history at Nottingham Trent University



Power play Kublai Khan hunting, depicted on a 13th-century scroll painting

David Andress on an account of **popular politics during the French Revolution**



The Police and the People: French Popular Protest 1789-1820

by Richard Cobb
(Clarendon, 1970)

Richard Cobb, who died in 1996, is the rock against whom all sweeping interpretations of the French Revolution must beat. Relentlessly sceptical of the schemas of the great Marxist historians, his meticulous research into the surviving records of common life, cast onto the page with a novelist's eye for telling detail, also defies the scorn heaped on the "swinish multitude" by those on the right.

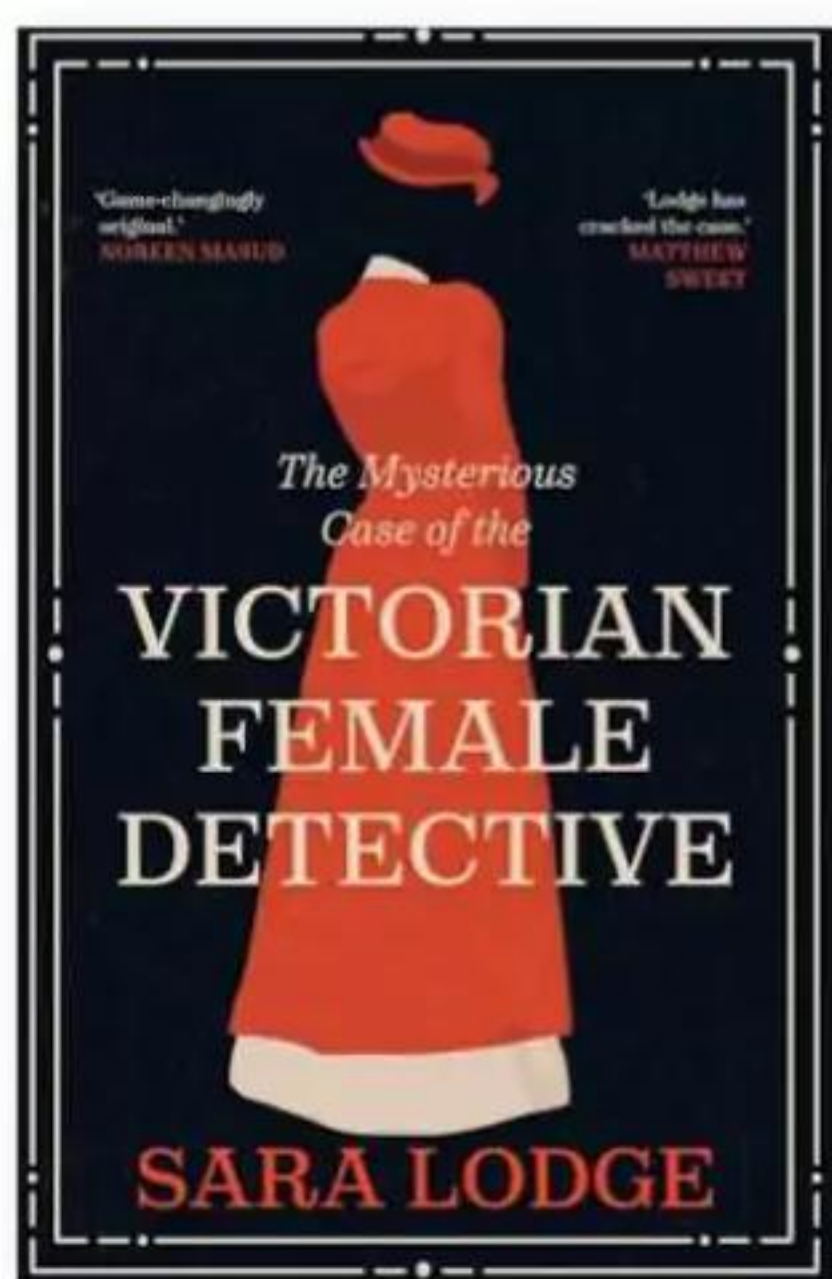
The Police and the People sets out a series of arguments about the nature of popular engagement with revolutionary politics that still challenge the reader today. His opening chapters depict the relentless surveillance that authorities sought to impose on the common people, and the concomitant development of a police mentality driven almost entirely by stereotypes. He also reminds us that virtually everything history can know about the "revolutionary militant" comes from the records of just such hostile enquiries, and the self-serving manufacture of orthodoxy that they generate.

Through an account structured by the abiding dread of starvation in the 1790s, Cobb depicts the thuggery of militant minorities, communities' fear-driven conformity, and frequent relapses into indifference when the eye of state agents passed elsewhere. Gifted with a talent for evoking empathy for the unsympathetic, he challenges any temptation to idealise any of this, while also insisting that "Historians, few of whom have ever experienced hunger, have no business blaming poor people" for what they might do under its cosh. **H**

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David Andress is professor of modern history at the University of Portsmouth

The not-so-gentle touch

REBECCA RIDEAL is exhilarated by a colourful, character-led exploration of women's roles in crime detection in the 19th century



The Mysterious Case of the Victorian Female Detective

by Sara Lodge
Yale University Press,
384 pages, £20

On 15 August 1896, the weekly *Illustrated Police News* ran a

sensational headline story about a man and woman who'd been caught by a "Female Detective" in the act of committing adultery. The accompanying illustration showed the pair in a hotel room, dressed only in their nightwear, as a smartly dressed woman pointed at them in an accusatory manner through an open door.

The article reported that the couple, who had booked into the hotel as "Mr and Mrs Griffiths", were in fact Welsh chemist Tudor Williams and Lina Hughes, a married pub manager. The story caused a scandal, and a costly divorce followed.

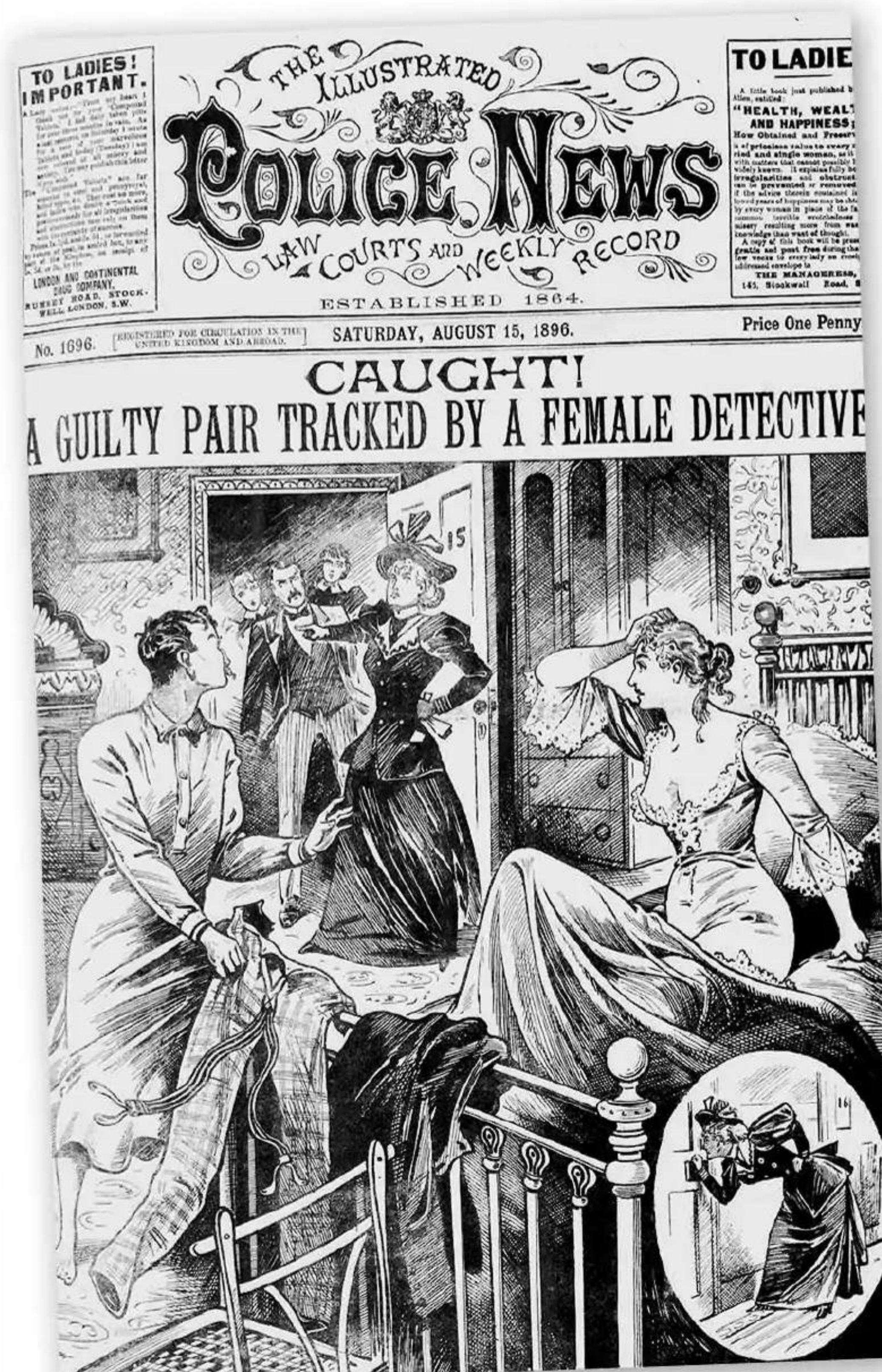
The detective who made the discovery was a retired police constable's wife and "private agent" Emily Oxley, who had been hired by Lina Hughes's husband because she specialised in adultery. She is just one of dozens of women featured in Sara Lodge's wonderfully illuminating new book.

Beginning with the curious appearance of the female sleuth in two works of fiction in 1864, Lodge draws extensively from British newspapers, trial accounts, novels, plays, musicals and census records to investigate the many ways in which women contributed to crime detection in the mid-to-late 19th century.

Lodge is particularly skilled at humanising the story, and at giving readers a real sense of place and time. We see how claustrophobically connected the worlds of literature, news and crime detection could be. The liberal news publication *Truth*, for example, was based just across the road from the

// We see how claustrophobically connected the worlds of literature, news and crime detection could be //

Feminine wiles An 1896 newspaper imagines the moment when female detective Emily Oxley caught an adulterous couple in flagrante. A new book examines the diverse roles Victorian women played in crime detection



Westminster Detective Agency, from which it would regularly receive "snoops and scoops". And the offices of the publisher FV White (which produced books by authors including female detective fiction writers Catherine Louisa Pirkis and Florence Marryat) were in the same building as Maurice and Antonia Moser's famous detective agency.

Figures such as Antonia Moser and Emily Oxley force us to confront a morally murky world in which divorce was hard to secure for women, in which social stigma was more severe, and in which female detectives often worked to the detriment of other women – particularly in cases of adultery.

Private detectives represented only one manifestation of crime detection, though, and Lodge uses the term 'detective' as broadly as the Victorians did themselves. She includes in her definition many working-class women who, from the 1840s onwards, worked for the police as 'searchers', examining perpetrators and victims for trauma, weapons and hidden objects, and often providing evidence at court. One such was Anne Lovsey, who served as an employee of Birmingham Police for 36 years.

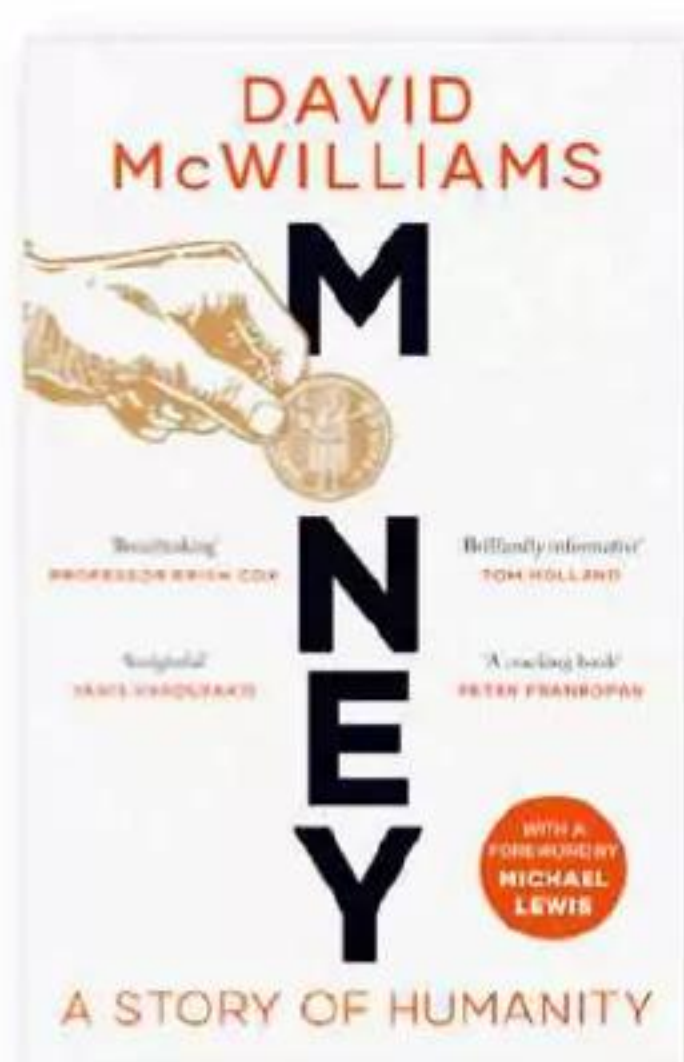
We also meet the have-a-go heroes whose quick thinking and fast action stymied crimes as they unfolded. There was, for example, shopkeeper's wife Jemima Davis who, in 1883, was celebrated in the press for tracking down and apprehending a serial counterfeiter.

The history of women and their involvement in crime has been covered substantially in recent years – as victims of dreadful offences as well as in sensational cases involving female perpetrators. Lodge's new book provides a refreshingly different angle, with women as investigators. Deeply researched and written with wit and verve, it interrogates clues, examines evidence, and sleuths through sources to make a compelling case for women being far more embedded in crime detection in the Victorian era than has previously been acknowledged. **H**

Rebecca Rideal is a historian, true crime producer and the author of *1666: Plague, War and Hellfire* (John Murray, 2016)

ECONOMICS

Popular currency



Money: A Story of Humanity

by David McWilliams

Simon & Schuster, 416 pages, £25

It was not surprising that David McWilliams, a leading Irish economist who has made the subject

accessible to so many via his podcast and festivals, would write an economics book that is much more than a standard text. Instead, this is a vast history of money and how it has affected our lives.

The story begins with the Ishango bone, dating from 18,000 BC, which might have been a kind of early commercial ledger. It then proceeds past Babylon and the adoption of coins and other physical forms of money, before concluding in the modern era. There's also a fascinating chapter about the psychology of money.

To describe this as a history of commercial ledgers, coins and fiat (or paper) money – as well as digital currencies – would not do the book justice. At its heart are the people who used and created the various forms of money, with each chapter focusing on characters, often colourful, who utilised it to support livelihoods, commerce and trade



Key figures A 16th-century Dutch painting of a money changer and his wife. Human stories are vital elements of a new book that has “at its heart... the people who used and created the various forms of money”, says Linda Yueh

that eventually impacted all of our lives. It's the humanity of the subtitle that makes this book so engaging.

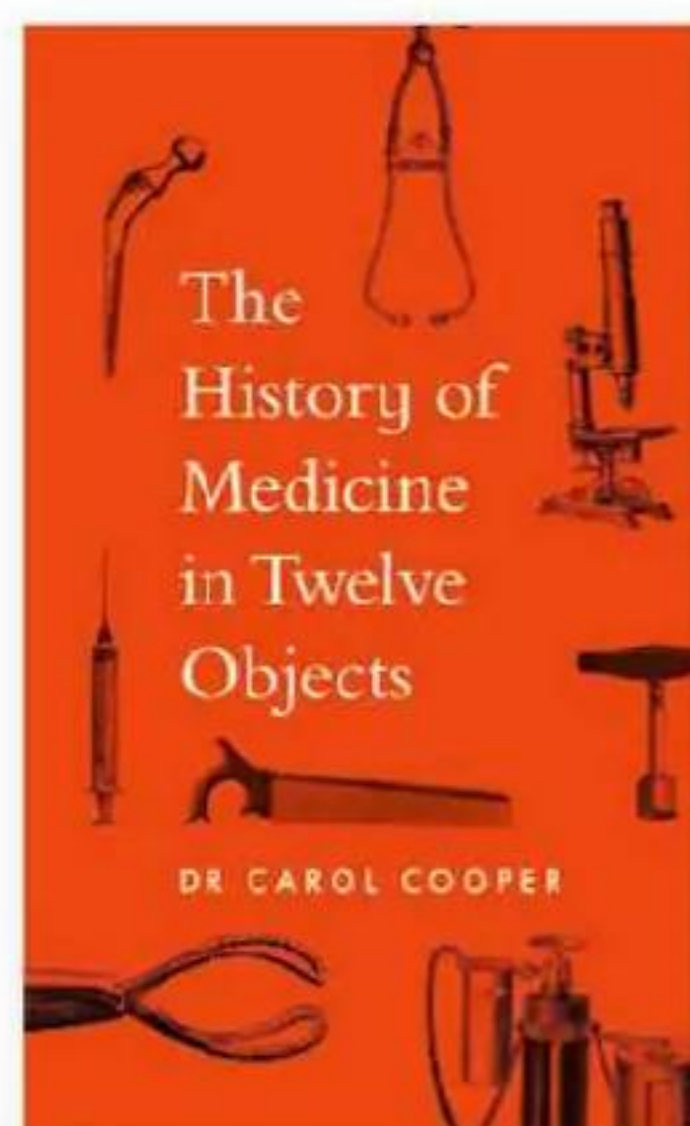
In keeping with his background as an economist active in the public sphere, McWilliams' writing is not only accessible but also incorporates plenty of humour to enliven the text, with stories that are sometimes irreverent but always entertaining. This is an author who knows how to hook his audience.

There is no shortage of books about money, the history of currencies and monetary regimes, but few are as lively as this one. With McWilliams as your guide, your journey into the story of money will be so much more digestible and fun. **H**

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Linda Yueh, fellow in economics, St Edmund Hall, University of Oxford and author of *The Great Crashes* (Penguin, 2023)

MEDICINE

Healing words



The History of Medicine in Twelve Objects

by Carol Cooper

Aurum, 304 pages, £18.99

Is it possible to recount the history of medicine through just a handful of

objects? That's the ambitious task Dr Carol Cooper sets herself in her vividly written new book. The items she surveys range from sophisticated medical machines (X-ray, ECT and heart-lung machines, the microscope) to specialised medical and surgical tools (the stethoscope, obstetric forceps, the bone saw) and material artefacts that are applied to or incorporated in the body (the

mask, the prosthetic hip). A helpful timeline enables the reader to navigate the book's extensive chronology, stretching from 10,000 BC to the 1990s, though the most detailed discussion relates to medical technologies and techniques from the 17th century onwards.

Cooper is skilled at explaining how simple or accidental observations have led to groundbreaking shifts in medical practice. The stethoscope, for instance, originated in 1816 when the French doctor René Laënnec rolled up a notebook and applied it to a female patient's chest when he was embarrassed to position his ear directly on her body. Cooper also weaves into her narrative many other objects, such as the white coat and medical gloves.

The protagonists of this story are almost all men, and the introduction argues that women have only recently “breached the doors of medicine”. Though it was indeed difficult for women to access a formal

medical education throughout most of history, the book could have given more space to their varied health-related roles in the past. Certain judgments about medical history could also be questioned. Galen's theory of the four humours is termed “outlandish”, yet this model shaped European medicine for centuries, and chimes with some ideas about wellbeing today.

Overall, though, Cooper's book is highly readable, and will open up medical history to a wide audience. Though it is organised around objects, people are in fact at its heart, and it shares compelling stories of the lives of doctors, scientists and patients. The author also makes astute observations about present-day health challenges such as Covid-19, demonstrating how a historical perspective helps us make sense of medicine today. **H**

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Elma Brenner, research development lead, Wellcome Collection

ENCOUNTERS

DIARY By Jonathan Wright and Danny Bird
HISTORY COOKBOOK Tudor snow
CITIES Venice, Italy



Jane Seymour (Kate Phillips) enjoys her moment in the royal sun as the third wife of Henry VIII. But dark clouds hang over both her fate and that of the king's chief minister, Thomas Cromwell, in the BBC's adaptation of Hilary Mantel's *The Mirror and the Light*



TV

Power plays

In 1536, after Anne Boleyn's fall from grace, Thomas Cromwell was in his pomp. As chief minister to Henry VIII, he was deft enough to thrive while his capricious monarch found happiness with third wife Jane Seymour. But being in Henry's immediate orbit was always dangerous, as Cromwell learned in 1540 when, with high-born enemies circling, he found himself facing politically motivated charges relating to his conduct in office.

Based on the final novel in the late Hilary Mantel's acclaimed *Wolf Hall* trilogy, the six-part BBC One series *The Mirror and the Light* sees Mark Rylance again starring as Cromwell alongside Damian Lewis as Henry. Jonathan Pryce also returns (presumably in flashback) as Cardinal Wolsey, and the cast also includes Kate Phillips as Jane Seymour and Timothy Spall as the Duke of Norfolk.

Wolf Hall: The Mirror and the Light

BBC One / mid-November



What's on this week?

Visit historyextra.com for updates on upcoming history TV and radio programmes



EXHIBITIONS

Picasso: Printmaker

The British Museum, London / 7 November–30 March 2025 / britishmuseum.org

Showcasing some 100 works by Pablo Picasso, this exhibition examines his lifelong engagement with printmaking. Featuring pieces from his acclaimed *Vollard* and 347 suites, displays explore his artistic experimentation, relationships and autobiographical themes. Highlights include *Leaping Bulls* (below), created in 1950 while Picasso was in Britain for the World Peace Congress in Sheffield.

**A Fragile Correspondence**

V&A Dundee / Opens 22 November / vam.ac.uk/dundee

Following its debut as Scotland's entry at the 18th Venice Architecture Biennale last year, this innovative exhibition comes home for autumn. Curated by the Architecture Fringe, *-ism* magazine, and /other, it explores the relationship between land, architecture and language across three Scottish landscapes. This is a powerful meditation on how memory and identity can inform the future.

Fred Kormis: Sculpting the Twentieth Century

The Wiener Holocaust Library, London / Until 6 February 2025 / wienerholocaustlibrary.org

This autumn, the Wiener Holocaust Library is spotlighting the work of sculptor Fred Kormis, whose experience as a prisoner of war and then as a Jewish émigré to Britain from Nazi Germany profoundly shaped his work. Pieces reflect his focus on the themes of captivity and loss that defined his lifetime. **H**

Fred Kormis's bronze-resin sculpture *Adam and Eve* (1986)



Cillian Murphy stars as Bill Furlong in a new film exploring Ireland's Magdalene Laundries scandal

FILM**Institutional abuse**

The scandal of the Magdalene Laundries continues to haunt Ireland. This is hardly surprising when you consider that, during the 19th and 20th centuries, as many as 30,000 'fallen women' were confined to institutions run by the Catholic church, forced to give up their children for adoption and to work in terrible conditions.

Based on Claire Keegan's Booker-shortlisted novel and co-produced by its star, Cillian Murphy, *Small Things Like These* emphasises just how long this practice continued. He plays Bill Furlong, a coal merchant in New Ross, County Wexford who in 1985 confronts small-town secrets – secrets that open a door to his own troubled past.

Small Things Like These

In cinemas from Friday 1 November



Media entrepreneur Giancarlo Parretti meets a chained lion in 1990, the year he bought MGM – famed for its roaring lion logo

TV**Movie madness**

In 1990, Italian film mogul Giancarlo Parretti pulled off a huge coup when he bought MGM/UA Entertainment Company, paying more than a billion dollars. Hollywood collectively hoped that the deal would revitalise the studio; instead it resulted in the 17th James Bond film being put on hold, Dustin Hoffman being issued pay cheques that bounced, and hundreds of people losing their jobs. Under investigation by the FBI and

facing multiple lawsuits, former waiter Parretti eventually fled the US.

In a new feature-length documentary, Parretti now offers his own account of what happened. "Giancarlo Parretti is one of the most fabulous storytellers I've come across," noted director John Dower. "He and Hollywood were made for each other. It's an utterly bonkers tale."

The Man Who Definitely Didn't Steal Hollywood

BBC iPlayer / Streaming now



FILM

Lucius Verus (Paul Mescal) wields a gladiator's sword in the sequel to Ridley Scott's multi-Oscar-winning epic

Fight for survival

For more than 20 years there has been talk of a sequel to *Gladiator*, the film that so spectacularly gave new life to the sword-and-sandals epic – and, along the way, made a superstar of Russell Crowe. The wait is finally over this autumn, with Ridley Scott – Hollywood's busiest octogenarian – returning to direct the new blockbuster.

The action picks up two decades after the events of the first film, following the story of

Lucius Verus (Paul Mescal), grandson of emperor Marcus Aurelius and son of Lucilla (played by Connie Nielsen), who is forced into slavery. Inspired by the exploits of Maximus Decimus Meridius, Crowe's character in the original film, the young man resolves to compete in the arena.

Gladiator II

In cinemas from Friday 15 November



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC/ALAMY

Dramatic reconstructions add heft to a new series exploring the history of witch trials in Europe and North America

TV

Fear and loathing

It wasn't until the late 18th century that witch trials finally ended in Europe. But why did the practice, which saw so many – mostly women – examined and often executed, persist for so long?

A new six-part series mixing dramatic reconstructions with expert interviews aims to provide answers as it interrogates key trials – or, in truth, essentially miscarriages of justice – in Germany, Scotland, England, Sweden, North America and Ireland.

The first episode focuses on James VI of Scotland's horror of witches – a fear rooted at least in part in the belief that witchcraft caused storms that hit ships carrying the king and his wife, Anne of Denmark. **H**

Witches: Truth Behind the Trials

National Geographic / Wednesday 30 October

RADIO HIGHLIGHTS

Hot topics

It seems extraordinary now but, until smoking in enclosed public places was banned in Scotland in 2006 and the rest of the UK in 2007, going to the bar in Britain's pubs often involved walking through an acrid, carcinogenic smog. Why did this situation endure for so long? In **Archive on 4: Up in Smoke** (BBC Radio 4, Saturday 2 November), Alan Hall traces the social-cultural history of cigarette smoking, touching on key moments including James Albert Bonsack's 1880 invention of a cigarette-rolling machine and the King's Cross fire of 1987 – likely caused by a smoker's dropped match – that killed 31 people.

Archive on 4: Upon the Education of the People (BBC Radio 4, Saturday 30 November) focuses on the 1944 Education Act that split secondary schools into three types – grammar, secondary modern and technical – and was widely seen as a progressive measure. Bright kids from modest backgrounds who passed the 11-plus often benefited from a grammar-school education – but many who failed the exam weren't so lucky, and missing out on a grammar school place carried a stigma. The programme looks at the impacts of the system on people's lives, exploring themes such as class, social mobility, and friendships made and lost.

Among the forthcoming historical dramas on BBC Radio 4, **O Is for Orson** (Saturday 9 November) – part of a season on rule-breaking and rule-breakers – looks at Orson Welles (below; 1915–85). Scripted by Jonathan Myerson, it reminds us how Welles, still in his 20s, caused panic with his 1938 radio adaptation of *War of the Worlds* and directed *Citizen Kane* (1941), a film that made an implacable enemy of media magnate William Randolph Hearst (1863–1951).

In the same season, **The Markov File** (Saturday 16 November) charts the life of Bulgarian writer and dissident Georgi Markov (1929–78), who was assassinated using a poison-tipped umbrella. Listen out, too, for **Illuminated – Voices from the Bog** (BBC Radio 4, Sunday 1 December), which gives voice to Lindow Man and Lindow Woman, whose bodies were discovered in a peat bog in Cheshire many centuries after their burials. **H**



RECIPE

Tudor snow

ELEANOR BARNETT is delighted by a decorative recipe for a showstopping dish designed to recall the brisk days of winter

Serves: 6–8

Difficulty: 1/10

Time taken: 30 mins

INGREDIENTS

3 egg whites
500ml double/whipping cream
100g icing sugar
3 tbsp rose water
1 small loaf of bread, unsliced
3–4 rosemary sprigs
Strawberries (optional)
Edible flowers (optional)
Edible gold or crushed biscuits (optional)

METHOD

1. Beat egg whites until thickened (the mix should stay in the bowl when tipped slightly).
2. Slowly add sugar and rose water.
3. Whip the cream separately then stir into the egg whites.
4. Cut the crusts off the loaf of bread, shape to look like a hill, and place on a dish upright.
5. Cover the loaf of bread with the 'snow'.
6. Add the rosemary sprigs on top and place a little 'snow' on them.
7. Decorate as you please by adding strawberries, edible flowers and sprinkles of edible gold or crushed biscuits.



In the Tudor era cows calved in spring, so cream was more easily available in summer



Whipped cream, egg whites and sugar combine to create a wintry appearance for this indulgent Tudor dish

As we move into colder months, I have been intrigued to find repeat references to 'snow' in Tudor recipe books. Snow itself was eaten in the era in places like Italy, where it was collected from the mountains and used to make sugary frozen drinks, the precursors to ice cream. The food that the Tudors called 'snow', however, was something quite different: a very simple dish of whipped cream to which egg whites, sweetener and flavourings were added. What's not to like?

The addition of beaten eggs was at the time a new innovation in British cookery – one that worked to stiffen the whipped cream, involving a technique that, in creating little pockets of air, would come in useful for making cakes. Long before the metal whisk or electric mixer, recipes to make 'snow' often describe the use of a birch rod – simply a bundle of sticks – to beat air into the mixture by hand, a laborious process that required great strength and perseverance.

The result would have been worth the effort, though. It really does look like snow, and Tudor recipes commonly instructed the maker to place the 'snow' on sprigs of rosemary to create a stunning winter landscape that would serve as a centrepiece for the table.

Funnily enough, the Tudors probably enjoyed this dish in the summertime, when

there was a greater supply of cream from cows (before the introduction of artificial insemination, cows mostly calved in spring, so milk and cream weren't typically available over the winter months). Always up for a culinary joke, they would have delighted in the irony of summery ingredients being transformed into an edible winter scene.

The 'snow' itself is really easy and quick to make, but you can spend some time playing around with the decoration to create a snowscape of your liking. I've added strawberries, but some Tudor recipes also used apples, almonds or crushed wafers and biscuits for some extra flavour and fun.

You could serve it as is, including a little of the bread with each serving of 'snow'. This might sound odd to our tastes but the bread acts much like a sponge cake, and the result is not dissimilar to trifle, which sometimes includes a layer of moistened bread. The snow itself would also go wonderfully alongside other sweet winter desserts such as a chocolate log, or to complement the spice in a sticky toffee pudding. **H**



Eleanor Barnett is a food historian at Cardiff University and @Historyeats on Instagram. Her book *Leftovers: A History of Food Waste and Preservation* (Apollo) is out now



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SOCIAL HISTORY



Reading the tea leaves

The story of tea is a global saga encompassing trade, consumerism and exploitation. In our latest *Everything You Wanted to Know* episode, **Jane Pettigrew** answers questions on the contentious history of the now ubiquitous beverage.

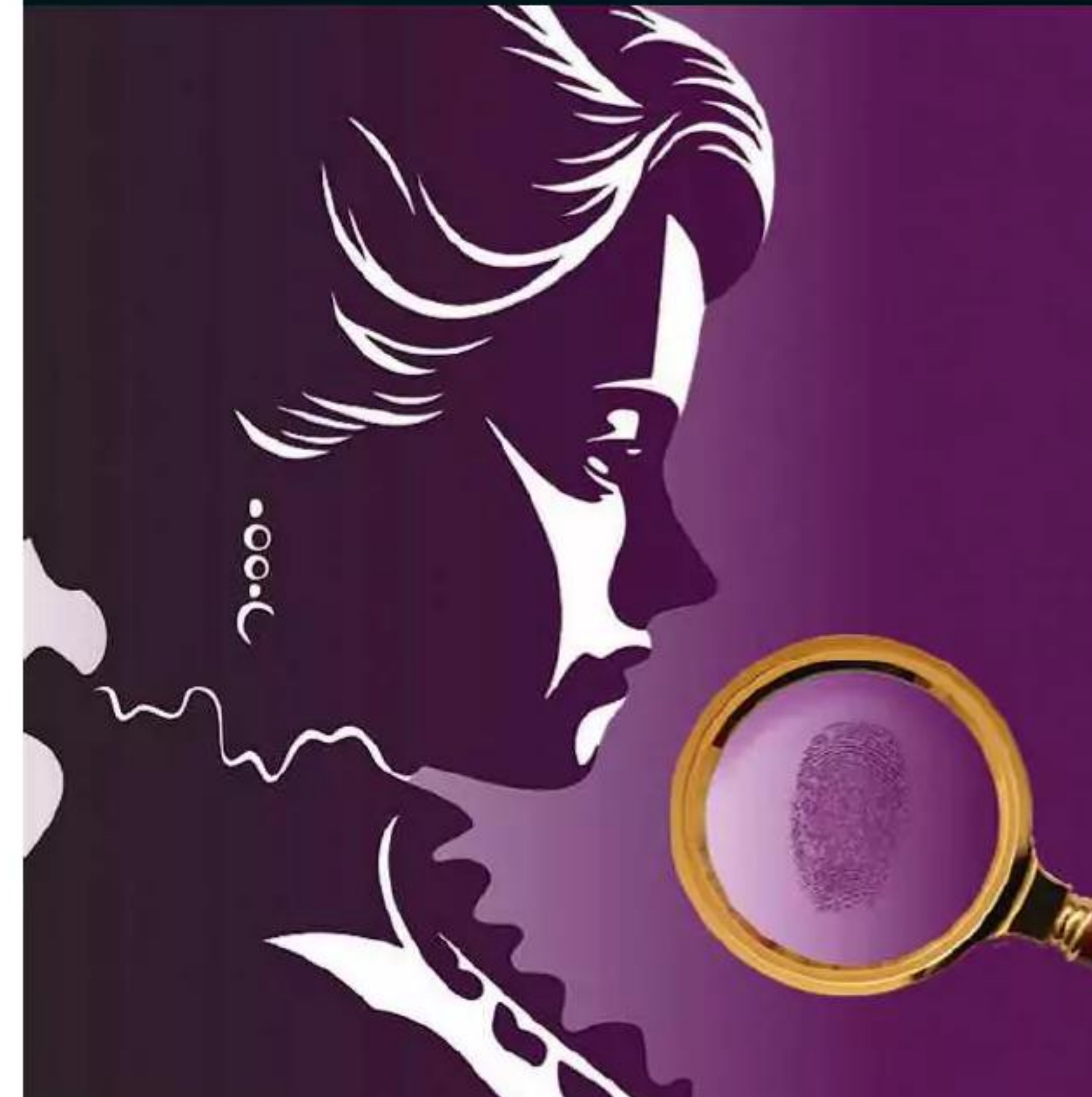
VIKING



Secrets of the Norse

The Vikings were much more than just bloodthirsty bands of raiders. Using precious fragments of original source material, **Eleanor Barraclough** delves into the stories of Viking men, women and children, revealing a lesser-known side of Norse life.

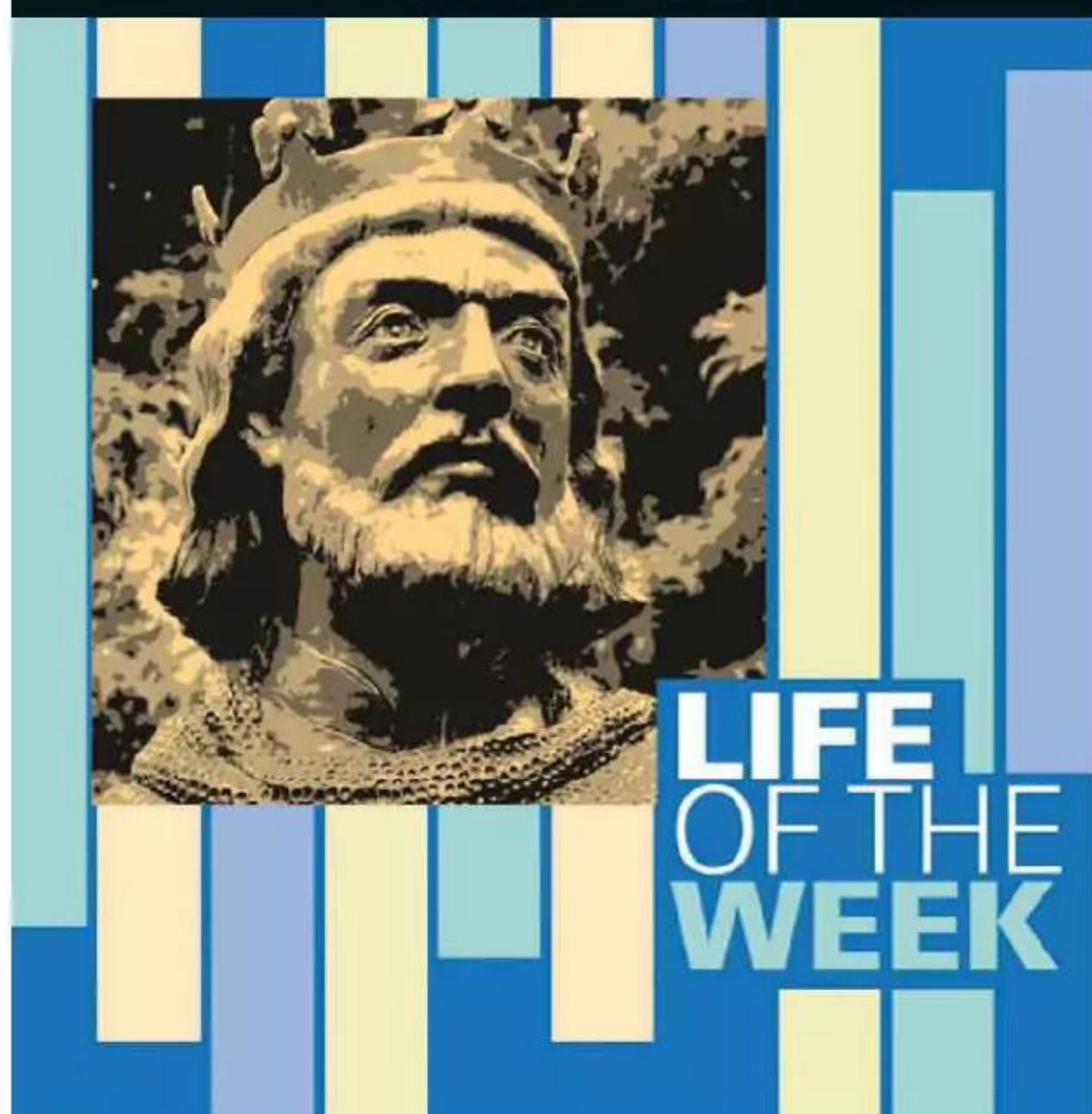
VICTORIAN



Unsuspected sleuths

Apprehending thieves, spying on adulterous husbands, and exposing child abuse – the exploits of female detectives in the Victorian era were dramatic and often dangerous. **Sara Lodge** reveals the role these sleuths played in fighting crime.

MEDIEVAL



Bad King John

Does King John really deserve his reputation as England's most abysmal king? Yes, according to historian **Nicholas Vincent**. In our latest *Life of the Week* episode, Nicholas revisits the medieval monarch's rotten legacy, discussing French invasions, Magna Carta and more.

WW2



Following the führer

Why were so many Germans prepared to participate in the horrendous crimes of the Third Reich? It's a question that has exercised historians and the wider public for decades. **Richard J Evans** discusses what drove people – from lowly functionaries to Hitler himself – to engage in mass murder.

AMERICAN



Arming America

Today there are an estimated 450 million guns in civilian hands in the United States – 10 times the amount at the end of the Second World War. **Andrew McKeivitt** charts the factors at play in the postwar United States that help make sense of this boom in privately owned weaponry.

Venice in five places

Once the capital of a trading empire and now a tourist hotspot, the city of canals can still surprise. **ELIZABETH HORODOWICH** picks five hidden gems to visit

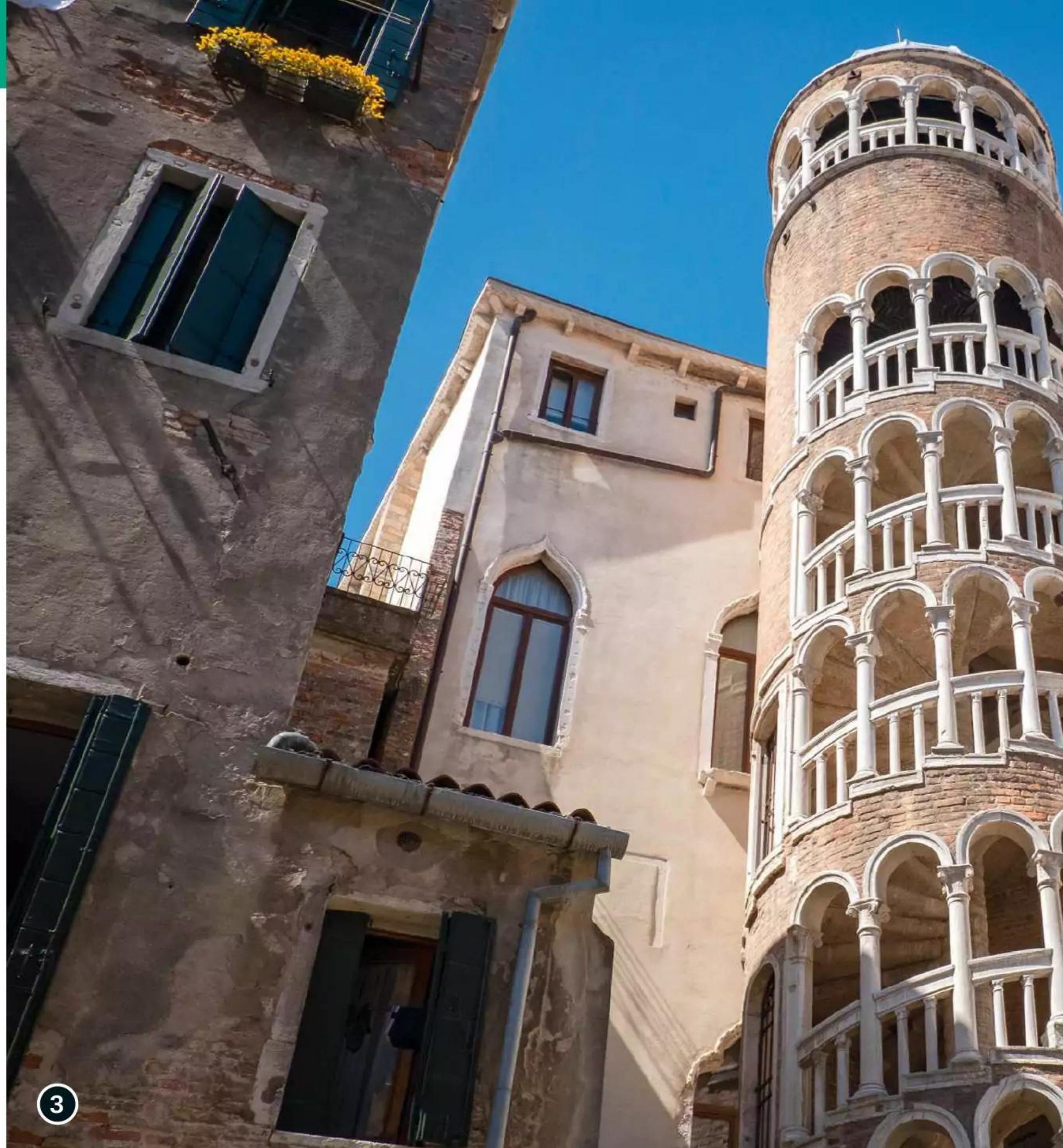
1 Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni Love and art

For a sense of Venice during the Renaissance of the 16th century, visit the building commonly known as the Scuola Dalmata, or Dalmatian School, in the *sestiere* (neighbourhood) of Castello. This was built by a *scuola*, or religious confraternity, founded in 1451 by Slavic sailors from Dalmatia (now largely encompassed by Croatia) known locally as Schiavoni, many of whom emigrated to Venice. A number of such charitable confraternities became established in Venice, enabling workers – in particular, craftsmen – to organise and protect themselves. A confraternity might help pay for the funeral of a member's relative, for example.

Scuole were important sites for socialising and also among the most significant patrons of art. The Dalmatian School boasts a series of early 16th-century panel paintings by the Venetian painter Vittore Carpaccio, which depict the lives of the *scuole*'s saints, George, Jerome and Tryphon. It's well worth visiting to admire these works – not in a museum but in the place where they were originally intended to be seen.



The funeral of Saint Jerome, painted by Vittore Carpaccio, can be seen in the Scuola Dalmata



The Palazzo Querini Stampalia was updated by architect Carlo Scarpa to help it withstand flooding



2 Fondazione Querini Stampalia Facing the floods

Housed in a Renaissance palazzo in the Castello *sestiere*, this museum and cultural institution is home to extraordinary historic and contemporary art, a centuries-old bookshop and diverse exhibitions. But one section not to miss is the ground floor of the museum. By 1959, this part of the structure had deteriorated badly, and the Venetian architect Carlo Scarpa was asked to redesign it – which he did in an incredible way. It's been rebuilt to cope with flooding, to accommodate the impacts of climate change that Scarpa understood presciently, as only a Venetian architect could.

As well as incorporating nods to the city's Byzantine past, including fine mosaics, he added channels, drains and raised walkways that allow the flooding to come into and out of the building without damaging it. It's a piece of architecture that acknowledges how the lagoon shapes everyday life in the city, and shows this incredible and dynamic interaction between history and modernity, change and continuity.

Snail staircases came into fashion during the Renaissance



3 Scala Contarini del Bovolo Snail's pa(la)ce

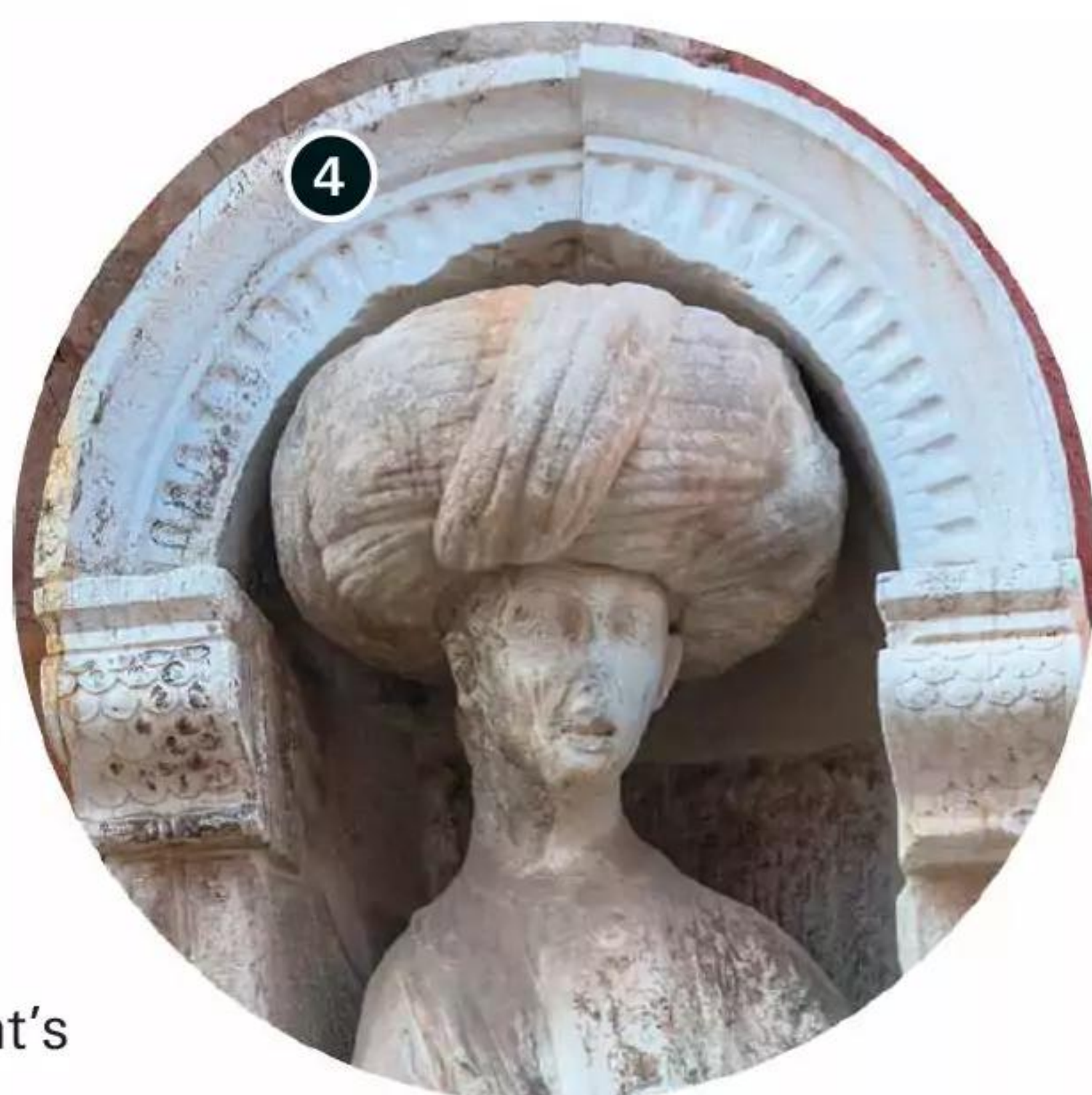
Signposted from the large Campo Manin in the *sestiere* of San Marco is the Palazzo Contarini del Bovolo, a Renaissance palace for the noble Contarini, one of the founding families of Venice. The most striking aspect of the building, parts of which date from the 13th century, is the dazzling exterior stone staircase – or *bovolo*, which literally means 'snail' in the Venetian dialect – commissioned in 1499.

The *palazzo* as a whole is a fine example of the very light style of Venetian architecture and, together with this open staircase, expresses the fact that the Venetians were not afraid of popular uprisings or of being conquered by anyone. They felt able to build a type of architecture that is delicate and confident, especially compared with Florentine designs, for example. It's a statement of their sense of invulnerability at the height of the Venetian empire.

4 Palazzo Mastelli del Cammello Spice of life

This palace from the 13th century, on the northern edge of the *sestiere* of Cannaregio, was home to a spice-trading family descended from brothers who arrived in Venice early in the previous century. In many ways, when viewed from the canal known as the Rio Madonna dell'Orto, it's a typical merchant's mansion: tightly packed rows of arched windows, grey stucco, a water gate opening onto the canal. But low on its facade is a bas-relief plaque depicting a turbaned man leading a spice-laden camel – from which the palace gets its popular suffix: del Cammello.

Just around the corner is the Campo dei Mori, where statues of the three Mastelli brothers are sculpted into the walls. Together, these two sites in this beautiful but quiet and less-visited corner of the city hint at the wealth and power that spice trading brought to medieval Venice.



A statue of a servant to the Mastelli brothers, who gave their name to one of Venice's must-see sites

The Ghetto Nuovo was created in the 16th century by the Venetian Republic, segregating the city's Jewish population

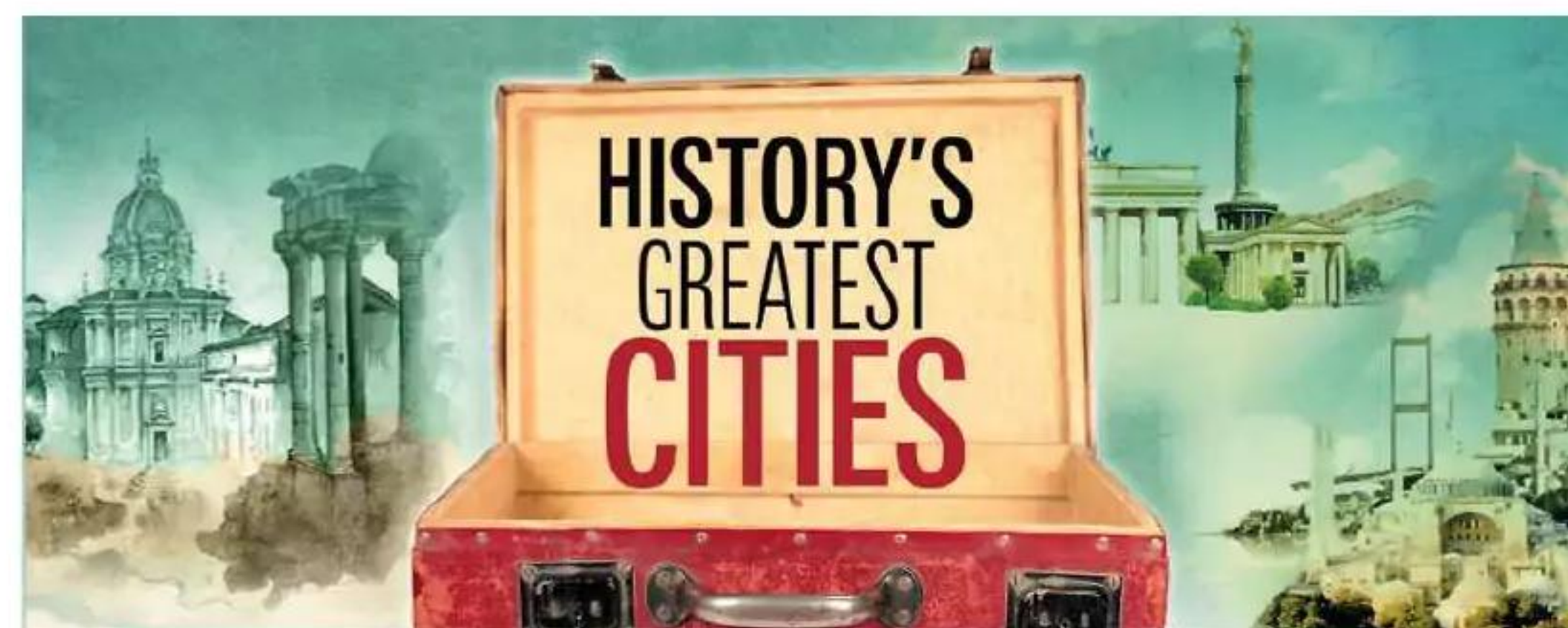


5 Ghetto Nuovo Origin of oppression

Jews had lived in Venice since the 12th century, but a wave of immigrants arrived after their expulsion from Spain in 1492, welcomed to the lagoon city as merchants and money lenders. In 1516, the government of the Venetian Republic decreed that the city's Jews would live on a small island in Cannaregio called Ghetto Nuovo. There they would be protected – or, really, segregated. The buildings in the ghetto are quite a bit taller than on the other islands of the lagoon because, with such limited space, inhabitants were able to build only upwards. Synagogues, many of which welcome visitors, are often on the very tops of the buildings.

The ghetto could be sealed up at night, and on several gates you can see holes where locks, removed after the Napoleonic conquest of Venice in 1797, had been set to confine the Jews. Almost all of Venice's Jews were deported in 1943 on Mussolini's orders, though the city is today home to several hundred once more. **E**

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Elizabeth Horodowich is professor of history at New Mexico State University, and author of *A Brief History of Venice* (Robinson, 2009). She was speaking to travel writer **Paul Bloomfield**, the host of our podcast series *History's Greatest Cities*



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PRIZE CROSSWORD

Across

7 See 27 down

9 Hedy _____, Hollywood star who co-invented technology that became the precursor to Wi-Fi, GPS and Bluetooth (6)

11 Hitler's chief architect and war production minister (5)

12 Medieval dungeon accessible only through a hatch in its high ceiling (9)

13 Bloody _____, notorious 1685 trials after the rebellion of the Duke of Monmouth (7)

15 Danish archbishop, close adviser to Valdemar I and founder of what became Copenhagen (7)

16 Henry VIII's sister, who ruled Scotland on behalf of her infant son James V (8,5)

22 Icelandic parliament, one of the world's oldest (7)

24 Adriatic port the Romans called Tergeste (7)

26 One of central Asia's oldest cities, occupying a strategic location on the Silk Road (9)

27 French city whose Roman and Romanesque monuments were recognised with Unesco World Heritage status in 1981 (5)

28 Conor Cruise _____, 20th-century Irish diplomat, politician, historian etc (6)

29 Anglo-Saxon kingdom of northern Britain, with a royal residence at Bamburgh (8)

Down

1 Young offenders' institution in Kent established in the early 20th century on the site of an older convict prison (7)

2 Edward _____, humorist, artist and, briefly, drawing master to Queen Victoria (4)

3 Indian troops who launched the Indian Rebellion in 1857 (6)

4 Those in Eelam, Sri Lanka formed the 'Liberation Tigers' in the 1970s (6)

5 Name applied to British defensive towers built during the Napoleonic Wars (8)

6 French city famously rescued by Joan of Arc from the besieging English in 1429 (7)

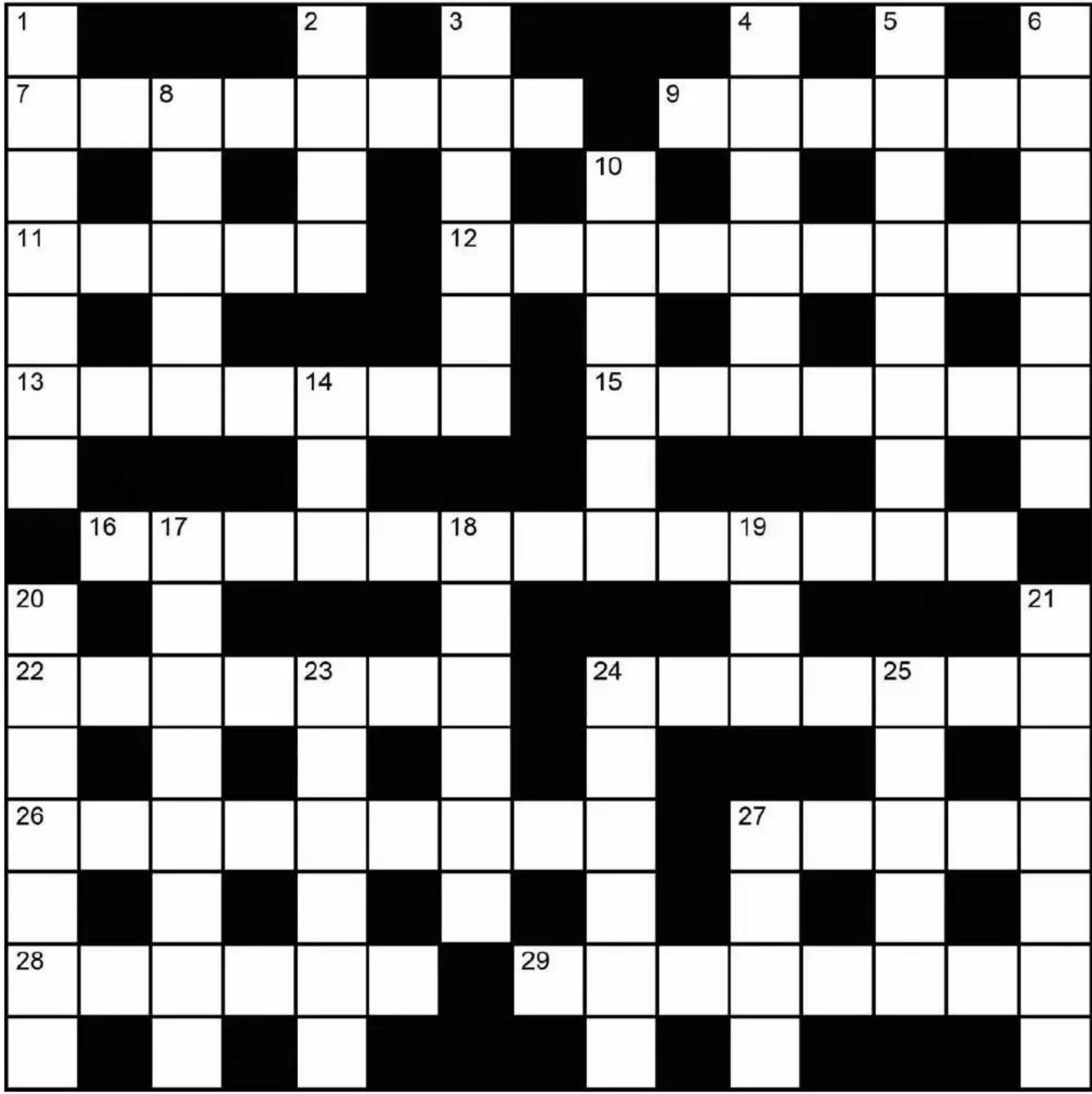
8 The Indian war game Chaturanga is thought to be an early predecessor of this board game (5)

10 Term for one of the historical regions/provinces of Russia etc (6)

14 During this Albanian king's reign, his country came to be dominated by Mussolini's Italy (3)

17 Cave of _____ in Cantabria, Spain noted

The siege on which French city was famously broken by Joan of Arc in 1429? (6 down)



Which Anglo-Saxon kingdom established a royal residence at Bamburgh? (29 across)

for its famous ceiling drawings believed to be up to 20,000 years old (8)

18 1st Baron _____, whose ambiguous order contributed to the disastrous Charge of the Light Brigade (1854) (6)

19 Statement issued by Rhodesia's prime minister in 1965, severing ties with the UK (abbreviation) (3)

20 Poet awarded the Military Cross, who protested against the First World War (7)

21 Achaemenid or _____ empire, established by Cyrus the Great (7)

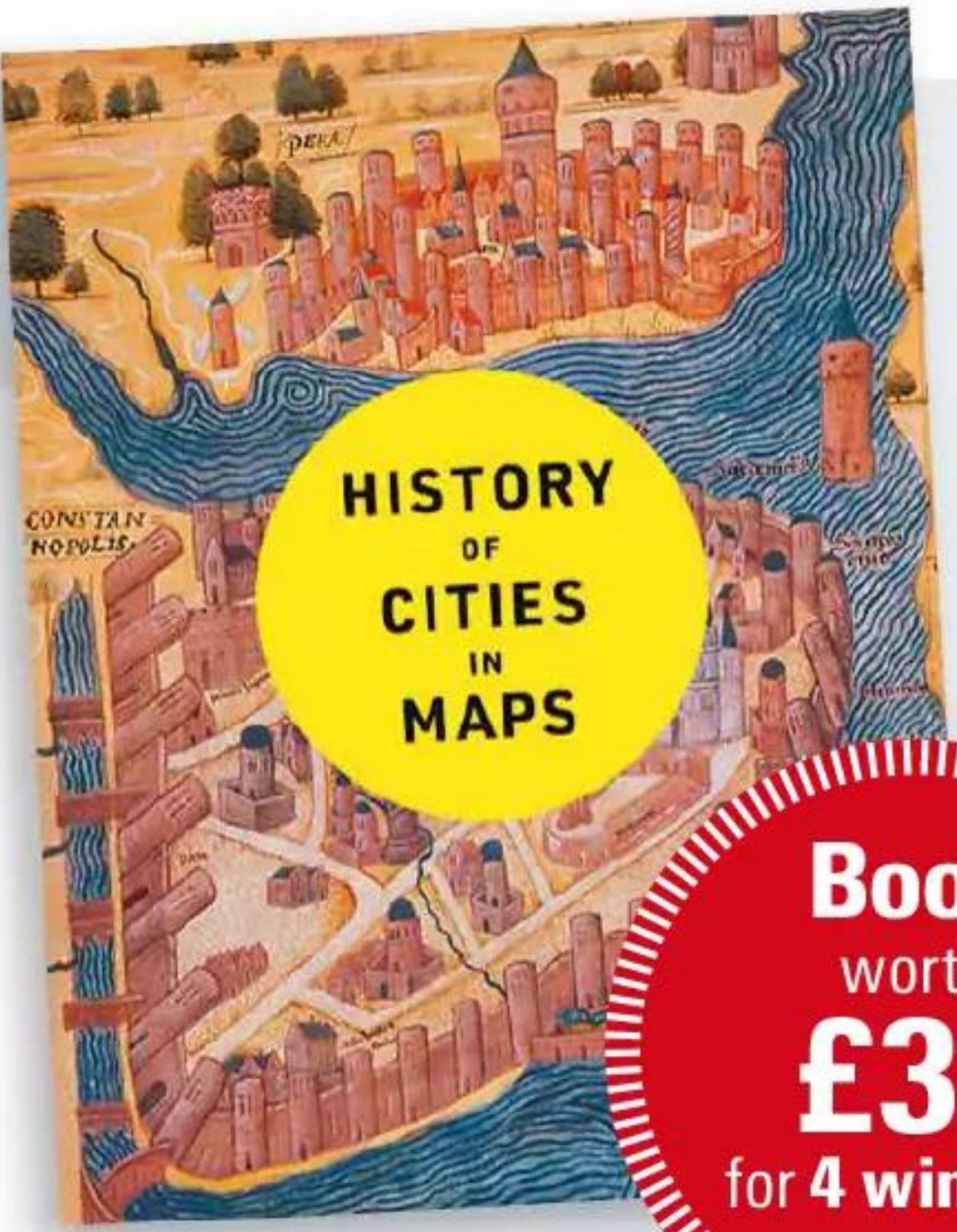
23 Nation that came into being as a united kingdom under King Saul in the 11th century BC (6)

24 Arthur William _____, British air marshal who became Eisenhower's deputy in 1944 (6)

25 Term applied to a fifth-century legal code that includes a notorious bar on daughters inheriting land (5)

27/7 across Her political marriage to an English king was annulled after only six months (4,2,6)

Compiled by **Eddie James**



Book worth **£30** for 4 winners

History of Cities in Maps

By Philip Parker

The earliest urban communities emerged over 9,000 years ago – but what did they look like, and how did they change over the millennia? This new book uses more than 70 historical maps to chart the development of cities around the world, exploring aspects of religion, transport and the evolution of human civilisations.

HOW TO ENTER

● Open to residents of the UK (& Channel Islands). Post entries to **BBC History Magazine, December 2024 Crossword, PO Box 501, Leicester, LE94 0AA** or email them to **December2024@historycomps.co.uk** by 5pm on 20 November 2024. ● Entrants must supply full name, address and phone number. The winners will be the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing time. Winners' names will appear in the January 2025 issue. By entering, participants agree to be bound by the terms and conditions shown in full in the box below. Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) will use personal details in accordance with the Immediate Privacy Policy at <https://policies.immediate.co.uk/privacy> ● Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) would love to send you newsletters, together with special offers and other promotions. If you would not like to receive these, please write 'NO INFO' on your entry. ● Branded BBC titles are licensed from or published jointly with BBC Studios (the commercial arm of the BBC). Please tick here ☐ if you'd like to receive regular newsletters, special offers and promotions from BBC Studios by email. Your information will be handled in accordance with the BBC Studios privacy policy: bbcstudios.com/privacy; – bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidance/code-of-conduct

Solution to our October 2024 crossword

Across 1 Triumph 5 Meitner 10 Zeno 11 Lupericalia 12 Santa Maria 13 Sark 14 Florin 16 Petra 18 Ilium 20 Column 22 Nash 23 Pretender 26 Battle-axe 27 Isca 28 Langtry 29 Strauss

Down 2 Rievaulx 3 U-boat 4 Pullman 6 Earhart 7 Transvaal 8 Emigre 9 SPQR 15 Reichstag 16 Pym 17 Americas 19 Impaler 20 Clement 21 Zambia 24 Eyam 25 Deira

Eight winners of *Knead to Know* by Nell Buttery

C J Deacy, Cheadle; Gary Siddle, Durham; G Robinson, Poole; Neil McLaughlin, Potters Bar; Isabelle Levitt, Newcastle upon Tyne; Beryl Maddison, Bath; Chris Skinner, Ipswich; Steve Leven, Watford

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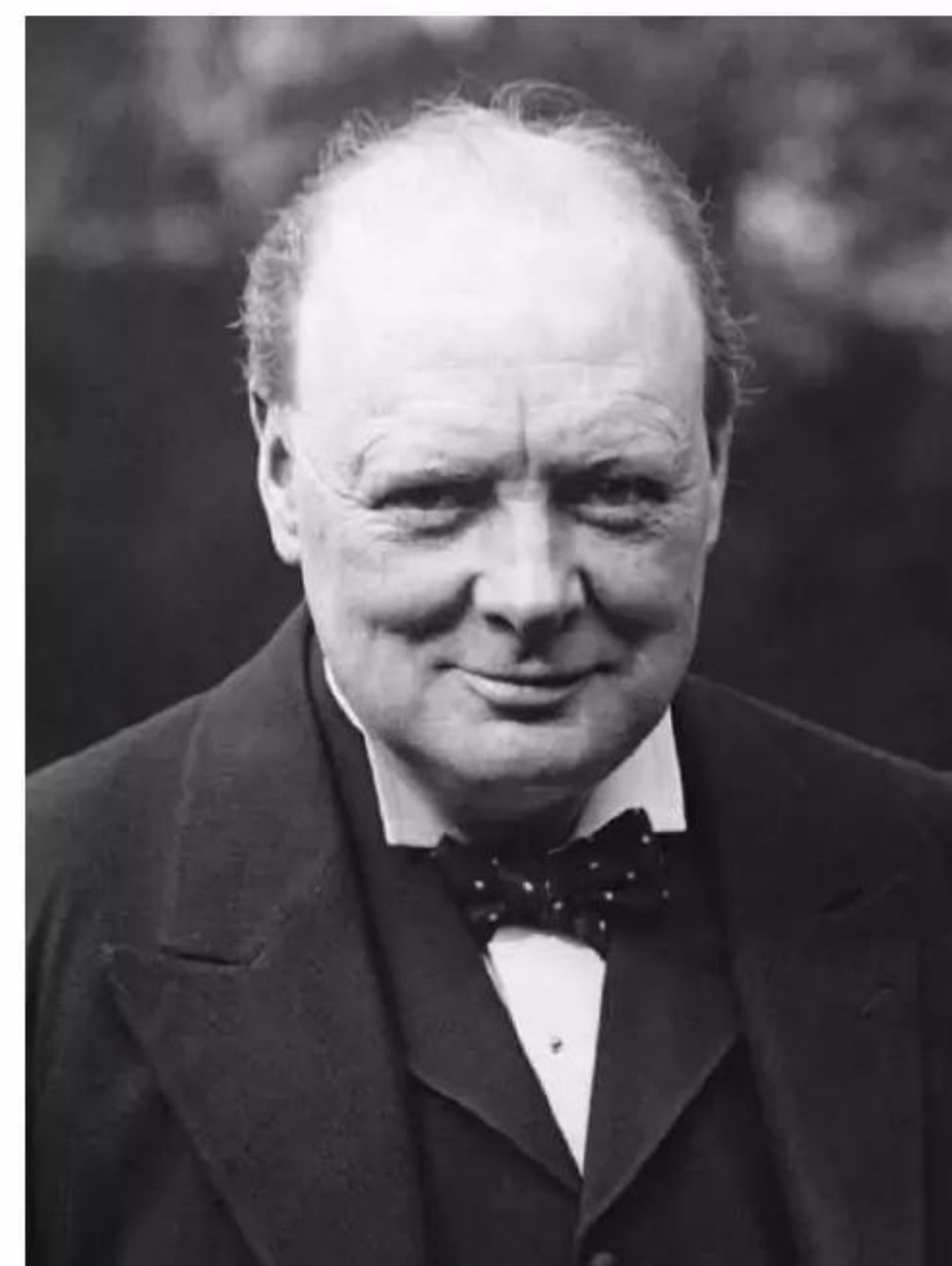




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MY HISTORY HERO

Former Conservative party leader **Iain Duncan Smith** chooses

Robert Peel

1788–1850



Robert Peel shown in a portrait from 1838. His finest hour, argues Iain Duncan Smith, “was putting country before party and repealing the Corn Laws”

IN PROFILE

Robert Peel was Conservative prime minister from 1834–35 and 1841–46, and was simultaneously chancellor of the Exchequer during his first premiership. He was also twice home secretary (1822–27 and 1828–30). He is best known for founding the Metropolitan Police Force in 1829 and repealing the Corn Laws in 1846. He died after being thrown from his horse, aged 62.

// I admire his drive and capacity for hard work – he and Gladstone were the towering political figures of 19th-century England //



When did you first hear about Peel? I first came across him at school during a history lesson, when we were studying 19th and early 20th-century parliamentary reform. I remember being fascinated by him and the positions he took on some of the big issues of the day.

Iain Duncan Smith was the leader of the Conservative party from 2001–03 and secretary of state for work and pensions from 2010–16. He has been MP for Chingford and Woodford Green (formerly Chingford) since 1992

What kind of man was he? The son of a wealthy textile manufacturer and politician, he was in essence a ‘High Tory’ – that is, a traditional Conservative of that era. He was also a highly intelligent individual, and got a double first in classics and maths (an interesting combination!) at Oxford. However, he was regarded as personally rather aloof and distant.

What made him a hero? Firstly, his immense drive and capacity for hard work – I think that he and William Gladstone (who admired Peel) were the towering political figures of 19th-century England. Secondly, the way that, when the facts changed, he rightly changed his mind on key issues like Catholic emancipation and the repeal of the Corn Laws [tariffs on imported cereals], both of which he initially opposed. And thirdly, the landmark legislation he drove through parliament such as founding the Metropolitan Police (the initial thousand constables employed by him were known as ‘peelers’ or ‘bobbies’), cutting the number of crimes punishable by death, and repealing the Corn Laws. That concept of evolution, not revolution, was to become a mainstay of the later Conservative party.

What was Peel’s finest hour? Putting country before party and repealing the Corn Laws after becoming a convert to free trade. He could see the tariffs had led to high prices – and things reached crisis point with the outbreak of the Irish Famine, following the failure of the potato crop. Opposing the Corn Laws with the help of the Whigs and radicals like William Cobbett – he had to work with the ‘Jeremy Corbys’ of the day – split the Tories and sparked confrontation with diehard opponents of reform like Disraeli. But Peel’s actions helped to alleviate the suffering, although probably too late to stop it outright.

What would he make of the Conservative party’s current predicament? I think he’d bury his head in his hands on learning that we’ve arrived at where we are today after achieving a significant majority in 2019.

What would you ask Peel if you could meet him? I’d ask him why he didn’t try to do more to reconcile the Tory party after it split over the Corn Laws, but he may have concluded that it was a hopeless cause, given the intransigence of people like Disraeli. **H**

Iain Duncan Smith was talking to York Membery



In the BBC Radio 4 series **Great Lives**, guests discuss inspirational figures: bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qxs8





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